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THE ROUND TOWERS  
OF  
IRELAND:  
THEIR ORIGIN AND USES,  
BY  
“S. J.”

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“TUILLE FEASA AR EIRINN ÓIGH.”  
(“AN ADDITION OF KNOWLEDGE ON HOLY IRELAND.”)

GILLA NA NEEVE O'HEEREN.



Belfast :  
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## INTRODUCTION.

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THE following Essay, on "The Round Towers of Ireland," was read in St. Mary's Minor Hall, Belfast, on the evening of 10th November, 1886, before a large and appreciative audience, under the auspices of the Belfast Young Ireland Society, of which the author is an honorary member.

In now offering the Essay, in pamphlet form, to the public, he is actuated by a desire to treat with deference the judgment of esteemed friends and the unanimous demand of the meeting. Sufficient indulgence has been extended to the author to create in him the hope that his labours will possess utility—at least for some.

So far as information on the subject could be gleaned from books, as well as from pleasant pilgrimages undertaken from time to time to many of the Round Towers, he has endeavoured to make the most of his opportunities.

He appends a list of the authorities whom he relies upon or criticises in reference to the Round Towers; or quotes for some collateral statement. To these, he is aware, he might have added the writings of Mr. Marcus Keane, Mr. Henry O'Neill and several others; but, in a paper compressed within certain limits, so as to be read in public, it was found impossible to discuss the system of every inquirer, who either substantially agrees with the views here advocated, or radically diverges from the well-defined lines, within which the question has, at this day, been satisfactorily settled in the estimation of the vast majority of the learned.



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## THE ROUND TOWERS OF IRELAND : THEIR ORIGIN AND USES.

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IRISH archæology, as advanced to any eminence, may be esteemed, like chemistry and electricity, to be almost entirely the growth of comparatively recent times. British antiquities have made but little progress since Leland, Camden, and Sammes exercised their laborious minds upon them. Olaus Wormius is still an indisputable authority upon the early history of his countrymen, the Danes ; and in the works of the seventeenth century antiquaries appertaining to France, Italy, and other European countries, almost as much about their national antiquities may be found as in those of any *savant* of the present day. The successful cultivation of Irish archæology, however, belongs to a later period. But if this has been the case, it has been owing to causes which are easily discoverable. With the invention of printing, and the restoration of letters, the ardour of minds, thirsting for knowledge, was stimulated in more favoured lands by the munificence of enlightened sovereigns ; and many, in consequence, bent their energies to the elucidation of their ancestors' manners, customs, and condition.

Italy had its Lorenzo the Magnificent, its superb Leo the Tenth, and the generous Alfonso the Fifth, of Naples : France had its princely Francis the First, and Henry the Second : Spain, its sympathetic Ferdinand and Isabella : the Empire its sage Maximilian and Charles the Fifth ; while even the penurious Henry the Seventh, and the sensual Henry



the Eighth, courted the praise of being considered the patrons of scholars. Under the fostering hand of these and other high personages, learning, in the several countries of Europe, put forth goodly shoots. Far otherwise was it with Ireland. Who was the patron of her talented sons? And under what circumstances did they contrive to pursue their unaided studies? Amid the devastation of ceaseless wars and the fanaticism of religious persecution: while to these disabilities there was superadded the inhuman code of laws, under which the schoolmaster was a proscribed person, and acquisition of the meanest knowledge a felony.

The policy which the representatives of English rule had pursued towards the Welsh MSS. they enforced against the Irish also, visiting our native records with every species of hostility. Dr. Rothe, Bishop of Ossory, in James the First's reign, testifies, in his *Analecta* (p. 342) that when the alien authorities became aware of a MS. history being in the hands of a private person, it was immediately begged or bought; or threats were employed to obtain possession of it if other means failed; so that a man's life was endangered by resistance to their will. He names Sir George Carew, governor of Munster, and author of the famous work *Pacata Hibernia*, as guilty of notorious robberies and ravages thus committed upon our written remains. The destruction which this man wrought in a single province among our ancient memorials, Sir Henry Sydney and other deputies extended to the entire kingdom, their conduct encouraging the belief that it formed part of their office to subvert every trace of antiquity in the country (p. 343). Dr. Lynch, who flourished under the two Charleses, avers (*Cambrensis Eversus*, vol. 1, p. 337) that wherever Elizabeth's troops were quartered they rifled the houses of friends and foes indiscriminately, carrying off Irish MSS., leaves of which were distributed to schoolboys to serve as covers for books, while others were cut up and converted into tailors' measures. Tradition still points out the place in Kilkenny where Dr. Colman O'Shaughnessy, Bishop of Ossory, early in the eighteenth century, concealed his little library; and examples of a similar nature might be easily multiplied. A dearth of Irish MSS. was thus entailed to succeeding ages. When Sylvester O'Halloran projected his *History of Ireland*, about ninety years ago, he tells us (vol. 2, p. 51) that he addressed letters to private individuals and advertised in the Dublin newspapers for Irish MSS. wherewith to supplement those which

were in his own possession already; but neither his private nor his public solicitations were attended with any great success. Need anyone wonder? This persecution of our native writings—if so bold an expression may be used—extended beyond the times of Elizabeth, the Stuarts, or Cromwell. An excellent Irish scholar, Dr. W. K. Sullivan, in his able introductory volume to Eugene O'Curry's *Lectures on the Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish* (p. xix), says :—"During the first part of the eighteenth century, the possession of an Irish book made the owner a suspected person, and was often the cause of his ruin. In some parts of the country the tradition of the danger incurred by having Irish MSS. lived down to within my own memory; and I have seen Irish MSS. which had been buried, until the writing had almost faded, and the margins rotted away, to avoid the danger which their discovery would entail at the visit of the local yeomanry."

The spoliation of the revenues belonging to the hereditary *literati* occasioned Dr. Lynch (vol. 1, p. 191) to lament that the age for a profound knowledge of our ancient language was past forever; and although some Irish scholars of that period were deeply skilled in the national antiquities, their works fall short of presenting a full or entirely accurate view thereof. Much they left unwritten; and this perished with them. An age of indifference succeeded. In the eighteenth century, Sylvester O'Halloran (*History of Ireland*; vol. 2, p. 49) and the venerable Charles O'Conor, of Belanagare (*Dissertations on the History of Ireland*. Pref. p. 9) were complaining, it is sad to think, of the small sympathy which the history of our early condition excited even in Irish bosoms. Eminent men of letters, not Irishmen—men like Edward Lhuyd, the Welsh antiquary, and Dr. Johnson, about this period, endeavoured to rouse scholars generally to the importance of the Irish language, literature, and antiquities. But the time for such a consummation had not yet come. The public ear was possessed by the Humes, and those other dainty gentlemen who, like him, wrote "Histories," lolling lazily on a sofa, scoffing meanwhile at the mere whisper of anything Irish.

These, then, are a few of the causes which have contributed to the lateness attending the development of Irish archæology. It is not unnatural if, under such untoward skies, Irish archæology produced indifferent fruit. Errors were propagated: some of them detrimental to the

character of our ancestors. But, almost contemporaneously with the triumph of civil and religious liberty in the fore part of the century, a new enthusiasm was engendered : Irish MSS. were unearthed, and their contents critically investigated and ascertained. Soon, continental scholars devoted themselves to Irish research. A Zeuss, a Grimm, an Ebel, and a Pictet mastered our language and studied our literary remains ; and in our own land an incalculable impetus was given to the elucidation of our antiquities by the patriotic toil of an O'Donovan, a Petrie, and an O'Curry. Many beliefs, entertained under circumstances of less enlightenment, were dissipated as devoid of foundation. Contrary to what had formerly been asserted and accepted, it was then found that the pagan Irish were not sun-worshippers : that they never held the transmigration of souls : that they paid no religious veneration to brown bulls, red cows, or any species of animal : that cromlechs were not Druids' altars, but rude sepulchral monuments : that the slope of the superincumbent stone of a cromlech was not for the purpose of allowing the blood of the slaughtered human being to flow off, for human sacrifices never polluted Ireland ; and other points connected with our antiquities were settled upon a correct basis.

Foremost among the ancient remains, whose history had been enshrouded in darkness—a darkness thickened, it might be said, by each successive hand which had attempted to dispel it—were the Round Towers ; and to have divested them of their robe of obscurity may rank among the greatest achievements of modern archæological science. It is to give some account of the Round Tower controversy that the following pages are written. In them the author proposes to himself to review the errors of preceding times, and to submit, in a popular form, the theory of Petrie, which he, in common with higher authorities, believes to be unassailable.



## THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE ROUND TOWERS.

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IN treating the question of the Round Towers, it will be proper to discuss, in the first place, the details of their construction.

These singular structures are calculated to vary in height, when perfect, from 50 to perhaps 150 feet, and are ascertained to have been built of divers stone materials, some being of limestone, others of sandstone, basalt, siliceous breccia, greywacke, mica-slate, &c. They have usually a circular, projecting base, consisting of one, two, or three steps or plinths, visible in some instances above the surface, and in others concealed beneath it. The Round Tower of Clondalkin, a specimen of conspicuous beauty, distant four miles from Dublin, stands upon a projecting circular base, terminated by a stone belt, 13 feet above the surface. The side of this base forms an acute angle with the ground, and, to adopt a homely comparison, imparts to the Tower the appearance which is often seen in the corresponding portion of a common japanned pepper-caster. In this peculiarity, it is, the writer believes, unique at the present day; but the Round Tower which once existed at Rosscarbery, County Cork, was its exact counterpart in this respect, according to the view of it published by Petrie, from an ancient episcopal seal of the diocese. (*Inquiry into the Origin and Uses of the Round Towers*, p. 368.) The Round Tower of Kinnehy, County Cork, presents the singularity of a hexagonal base, rising several feet above the ground.



At their greatest dimensions, that is to say, at the base, the walls are never less than two feet six inches thick, or more than five feet, corresponding herein with the general proportions. The average thickness, however, is about four feet. As the Tower tapers upwards, it almost invariably occurs that the internal, like the external diameter, undergoes a gradual diminution. This rule would not be without the proverbial exception if any reliance could be placed in this matter upon D'Alton's *History of County Dublin*. The Round Tower of Clondalkin, according to that work (p. 713), continues of the *same* internal diameter to about *two-thirds* of its height, whence it narrows *suddenly*." The writer has no hesitation in describing D'Alton's assertion as devoid of foundation, inasmuch as Petrie, an authority incomparably superior, gives a view of this Tower in the interior, setting forth the dimensions at each story; and so far from the interior diameter of the Round Tower of Clondalkin being "the same to about two-thirds of its height" and then diminishing "suddenly," the diminution begins at the bottom, making three inches in the first twelve feet, and proceeds in the most regular manner imaginable. The figures will speak for themselves:—7ft. 4in., 7ft. 1 in., 6ft. 10 in., 6ft. 8in., 6ft. 6in. This brings us to the top story.

In outer circumference the Round Towers vary from about 38ft., the dimensions of that of Taghadoe, County Kildare, to nearly 67ft., as in Monasterboice, County Louth; but the average circumference is about 50ft. The greatest internal diameter in the average specimen is 9ft.—generally something less. At Oran, County Roscommon, there is the stump of a Round Tower which exhibits the abnormally large internal dimensions of 11ft. 3in. in diameter. This Tower, which is about 12ft. high, if such a structure may be denominated a Tower, "seemed to me," says Isaac Weld, in his *Statistical Survey of County Roscommon* (p. 495), "rather to wear the appearance of not having been ever completed than of having fallen or been thrown down." The Round Tower which existed at Trummery, near Moira, till 1828, when it fell, had the smallest internal diameter of any that the writer has read of, measuring only 3ft. 9in. (*Ulster Journal of Archæology*, vol. 3, p. 300.) \*

With regard to masonry, these stone problems offer some variety; but, for the most part, they have been con-

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\* In 1833, Mr. John Rogan, of Moira, gave the diameter as "nearly five feet." (*Dublin Penny Journal*, vol. 2, p. 89.)

structed in what is technically known as "spawled rubble ;" in other words, masses of unsquared stone, the inequalities of which, as they manifest themselves in the course of erection, are filled up with small stones, inserted in every interstice, between the larger ones, in such a manner that very little mortar is left visible. Thus, the outside of such Towers as have been built after this fashion appears to be an almost unbroken surface of masonry, supplementary splinters of stone called "spawls" having been carefully driven, where necessary, into the wet mortar. In nearly all instances, the interior, as an inspection shows, has been carefully strengthened by the free application of lime-grout, that is to say, thin mortar laid on for the purpose of filling up the open joints and reducing all unevennesses of construction to a level. From many, however, the grout has largely given way, through the action of time. The Towers which are built of rubble belong, as a rule, to the most venerable type ; but an opportunity will be taken later on to discuss the age of these structures.

Writing in 1812, Dubourdieu (*Statistical Survey of County Antrim*, p. 598) says of the Round Tower of Trummery :—"The mason-work of this Tower is curious, consisting of two walls, an outside one, and an inside one, both formed of the round field stone, filled up between them with mortar and small fragments of flints and other stones." Mr. Rogan (*Dublin Penny Journal*, vol. 2, p. 89) denies that it had this appearance of a Tower within a Tower. He gives this explanation :—"The outer work of the Tower was of undressed, but well-chosen, land stones—that rule, by masons, called breaking the joint quite neglected—yet the inside wrought with the strictest order, and a considerable quantity of freestone used ; perhaps this has led some into an error who have asserted the Tower was composed of a double wall, &c."

A number, especially of the less ancient, of the Round Towers are built of ashlar, that is, hammer-dressed stone laid in courses. Seldom, however, are the courses perfectly regular. Instead of being uniform, the masonry is not unfrequently of a better character and workmanship towards the summit than at a lower stage. But at Drumlane, County Cavan, the reverse occurs. The late Edmund Getty, a local antiquary of considerable celebrity, writing in the *Ulster Journal of Archæology* (vol. 3, p. 18), says, to give an example :—"In that instance the lower part of the Tower is

composed of ashlar of excellent workmanship, while what remains of the superstructure is of the very commonest rubble-work ; so that it presents the appearance of the upper portion being a much more ancient work than the lower"—an impossible event, as need hardly be indicated. In other Towers there is a similar absence of uniformity in the masonic construction and in the description of material, pointing, at least in some instances, to partial restoration in a past age. Take that of Clonmacnois, known as O'Rourke's Tower. This Tower stands on an eminence overlooking the lordly Shannon, amid a scene of impressive solemnity, and for about 80ft. is constructed of fine sandstone, laid in regular courses, whence it is continued to the summit in coarse masonry of undressed limestone. It was repaired in 1135, after the upper portion had been destroyed by lightning. Again, the Round Tower of Kilmacduagh, County Galway, is built of superior rubble-work to the attic story, above which it is of inferior character. The Round Tower of Timahoe, Queen's County, for about 9ft., is of limestone ashlar ; to a height of some 35ft., it is then freestone ; and the rest is of limestone rubble. The Round Tower of Cashel presents an uncommon mixture, being built, for the first 5ft., of freestone, in irregular blocks, varied by limestone for the next 4ft. ; then 6ft. of freestone blocks, with limestone from that upwards.

The Round Tower of Devenish, Lough Erne, exemplifies another peculiarity of construction. In an interesting notice of it, to be found in the *Ulster Journal of Archæology* (vol. 3, p. 184), Mr. Getty says :—"The masonry of the entire building is excellent ; and it may be further remarked that the stones employed, though dressed, are not laid in regular courses ; but in such a manner as best suited the builder's convenience. Thus, in some places, one large mass occupies so great a space, that two or three courses of stones of the ordinary size, have been used before the whole was brought to a level ; and, in some instances, when a vacancy occurs in a course, the use of a small stone is obviated by a block in the next being so dressed as to key into the space below." Interlocking, as this is called, occurs in several other Towers ; for example, at Drumlane, Kilmacduagh, &c. It is visible usually in the basement story, and will be also observed in many of our primitive churches, as noticed by Brash, in his *Ecclesiastical Architecture of Ireland* (p. 153).

A noteworthy fact connected with the Round Tower of Devenish, and one which Mr. Getty omits to mention, is



this:—The stones used in the construction were all chiselled to the requisite curve, internally and externally, before being placed in position. Those of Ardmore Tower were similarly shaped. The quantity of mortar employed in some of the Towers is so small that a close inspection is necessary to discern it.

The Irish preceded both Anglo-Saxons and Normans in employing fine-jointed masonry. Not till the twelfth century did either Anglo-Saxon or Norman builders abandon their wide joints of mortar, placing, in some instances, as much as *three inches depth of mortar* between each course of stone. (Parker's *Introduction to Gothic Architecture*, pp. 13 and 34.) Thus, even their later work was clumsy in execution, when compared with some of Irish construction of a much earlier date.

Archdall, the author of the *Monasticon Hibernicum*, compares the Round Tower of Devenish for its singular smoothness of surface to a gun-barrel.

The Round Towers are subdivided into stories, ranging from three, as in the one at Antrim, to eight, as in that of Fertagh, County Kilkenny, the number being, as a rule (to which these instances may be taken as exceptions), in proportion to the height of the entire structure. These stories, in general, constitute chambers of about 12ft. each in elevation, and from 7ft. to nearly 9ft. diameter. In the absence of the floors, the former existence of stories is indicated, in the interior of surviving Round Towers, either by projecting belts of stone, offsets or ledges of the same material, or by large holes let into the wall to support the joists on which the floors rested. The latter were of wood, with few exceptions. "At Castledermot," says Brash, who is under the erroneous impression that none of the floors were of wood, "we find one complete floor and a portion of another arched in stone, with square holes for communication left in them. At Meelick is one similar floor. These spring from ample offsets or boldly-projecting string-courses: at Kinneith there is one floor on a level with the door-sill: it is composed of large, thick flags, which tail into the original masonry. These are the only existing original examples of such contrivances." (*Ecclesiastical Architecture of Ireland*, p. 112.)

The several stories, it is observable, are defined to the eye on the *outside* of some Towers by offsets of stone; and in at least two instances (at Ardmore, County Waterford, and Dysert, County Clare), by stone bands or belts, running round the exterior.

The Round Tower of Ardmore now contains six wooden floors, with ladders, put in by the direction of the lord of the soil (Mr. Odell), some forty years ago. That of Clondalkin was similarly refitted in the beginning of the century.

The doorway is mostly in the second story, or, at any rate, raised above the ground, the elevation varying from about 4ft., as in the Round Tower of Drumbo, County Down, to 26ft. as in that of Kilmacduagh, County Galway. At Drumbo the door must have been, in ancient days, less accessible than it is now; for Walter Harris, in his *History of County Down*, published in 1744, speaks of it as standing at a height of 6ft., or 2ft. higher than at present; whence it would seem that the earth has accumulated round the base in the interval, owing to interments in the graveyard in which the Tower is, as is usual, situated. We may, therefore, agree with so eminent an authority as Petrie (p. 402) that "there is no doubt that its elevation was originally at least eight or ten feet." As it is, however, it offers an advantage to the explorer, who will experience no difficulty in entering and dropping, if so inclined, into the interior, alighting on the ground floor, some eight feet beneath.

The Round Tower of Aghaviller, County Kilkenny, presents the anomaly of a doorway level with the surface, and, in the opinion of Tighe, who wrote the *Statistical Survey* of that County (p. 632), "apparently coeval with the building." The present writer hesitates to accept this suggestion. A doorway, of about the average elevation from the ground, still remains in this Tower, but walled up; and this circumstance appears to be against Tighe's supposition relative to the age of the surface doorway. The Round Tower of Ram Island, Lough Neagh, exhibits a great gap in one of its sides, reaching from the ground to a height of about twelve feet, but this is not the original doorway. The original doorway has been walled up.

The doorways are of different heights in themselves, from 4ft. 3in., or thereabouts, which is the admeasurement belonging to the specimen at Antrim, to 6ft. 10 in., the dimensions of that giving entrance to the Tower of Kilmacduagh, County Galway. They are not sufficiently wide to admit two persons at a time, the width being somewhere between 1ft. 7in., as in the specimen at Armoy, County Antrim, and 2ft. 10 in., as in that of Kilmacduagh.

In such Round Towers as are constructed of spawled rubble, that is to say, in those of the most venerable type,

as well as in the oldest specimens which are of ashlar masonry, the doorway is usually quite plain, and, in shape, square-headed, topped by a lintel made of a single large stone, similar to what may be seen at Drumbo, Antrim, Clones, Clondalkin, Swords, &c. ; or, as a variety, the doorway has a semi-circular head, the semi-circle consisting either of a simple arch, composed of several stones, as in the Round Towers of Oughterard, Tory Island, and elsewhere, or one which is cut out of a single stone, as at Armoy, Glendalough, &c. To this general rule there are two remarkable exceptions, one at Kildare and the other at Timahoe, Queen's County. Here the doorways are not plain, but elaborately decorated. The most ancient of the arched doorways, like that of Roscrea, are ornamented by a plain, flat band or architrave. Those of later date exhibit torus mouldings. The Round Tower of Monasterboice has two of these.

Such Towers as are built of ashlar masonry, that is to say, hammer-dressed stone, laid in courses, almost always have their doorways arched semi-circularly. In those specimens which are not of the very oldest type, architraves or bands appear on the external faces. The square-headed doorways are invariably narrower at the top than at the bottom, the inclination, or to be strictly technical, the batter, being from one inch to three inches. For the most part, the doors were of oak. It would seem that some of the Round Towers, like that of Roscrea, County Tipperary, had the additional security of a double door. In the vast majority of cases, the means employed to hang the door have disappeared, whether through the effects of time or violence ; but at Roscrea there are still visible the remains of the projecting stone-socket, made to hold the upper portion of the iron contrivance upon which the door swung ; while at the bottom, there is a pivot-hole, evidently to receive the other end of it. On either side there is a projection of stone, containing bolt-holes, presumably belonging to the locking-apparatus that was once in use : whence, one is led to conjecture, that in this Tower, at least, the door-bolts were shot in opposite directions ; so that the door was fastened on the hinge side, as well as in the ordinary fashion. Within, there is a contrivance for erecting the second or temporary door, with a bolt-hole, in the thickness of the wall, for securing it. Usually, the bolt-holes for the outside door, where there were two doors, may be found in the masonry composing the wall, and not in projections of stone, as at Roscrea. Iron hinges were also used,

judging from the Round Tower of Devenish, in the left hand side of the doorway of which there was recently, and, doubtless, still is, one strongly imbedded in the masonry, while, higher up, there is a fractured place, where the corresponding hinge evidently once was.

It is an error to suppose that the doorways of the Round Towers invariably, or even generally, face the west. Dr. Lanigan himself (vol. 4, p. 407) is not entirely free from this notion. They face towards all directions, as observation proves. For instance, that of Antrim Tower looks N: those of Armoey and Kildare, S: the original doorway at Cashel, S.W: those of Monasterboice and Kilkenny, S.E: that of Ram Island, S.S.W: those of Drumbo, Clones, Maghera, near Newcastle, Ardmore, and Dysert, E.: that of Kilmacduagh, E.N.E.; and so on. The situation of the doorway was regulated so as to face the entrance of the church to which the Round Tower was an accompaniment. The latter is usually found at a distance of twenty feet from the north-west end of the church—where the original edifice exists. Sometimes, however, it is farther off, as at Maghera, Kildare, Kinnehy, and elsewhere.

Many of the doorways are of a different description of stone from that employed in the main structure. The Round Tower of Antrim, for example, is built of basalt, with a doorway of dark porphyry: the great Tower of Glendalough is of mica-slate, with a granite doorway: that of Monasterboice is of limestone, with a freestone doorway; and so with numerous others.

At Clondalkin, County Dublin, Rattoo, County Kerry, and elsewhere, the place of the basement story, or chamber, is occupied by solid masonry. None of the Ulster Towers display this feature. But, even when the first story is not thus filled up, it never exhibits any aperture for the admission of light. Generally speaking, the top story is accommodated with four window-opes; but, in one of these structures, it contains only two, while others have five, six, or even eight. Where the number is four, they usually, though not invariably, face the cardinal points of the compass. The Round Tower of Donaghmore, County Meath, has, at present, no window-opes in the attic or top story; but this story is not the original one. It is merely a restoration, put on some fifty years ago. Bad taste, however, led to a deviation from what is usual in Round Tower architecture; and Sir Wm. R. Wilde, in his *Beauties of the Boyne and*



*Blackwater* (p. 161), censures the author of it. The restored roof, with its blunted top, is likewise an anomaly.

As a rule, each of the intermediate stories is lighted by a single window-ope, facing variously with regard to the compass, and commonly of small size, although, in some cases, the aperture over the doorway is scarcely inferior to the doorway itself, and would seem to be a second entrance, or, at least, capable of being used as such, upon occasion. It is almost always angular-headed. In the attic story the window-opes are usually larger than those which are intermediate. In external form they present three varieties—square-headed, angular-headed, and semi-circular-headed, the jambs battering or converging towards the top. When viewed from the interior, these opes differ in shape from their external appearance. One which is semi-circular-headed outside may be square-headed within, as in the Round Tower of Dysert, or angular-headed, as at Timahoe: while one which is angular-headed outside may be square-headed within, as at Cashel and Kilmacduagh, or semi-circular, as at Roscrea. It has been conjectured that this compound form was adopted because the architect foresaw that the spiral staircase would cover this part of the window-ope, and be an unsightly object to a person standing outside the Tower; hence, he concealed it by one or other of the devices mentioned. In general, the window-opes are uniform in external appearance; but, in some Towers—take Kells for example—the three varieties of ope appear in the one structure.

The roofs of the Round Towers are conical; but it is not improbable that in some specimens, now destroyed, they were dome-shaped. This, at least, was the case with the Tower which existed at Trummery, near Moira, till 1828. A gentleman named Rogan, a resident in the vicinity of this Tower, described, in the *Dublin Penny Journal*, in 1833 (vol. 2, p. 89), the manner in which these roofs were constructed, which was, by placing on the top of the wall, a frame, made of basket-work, and covering it over with concrete, whereon thin stones were laid, decreasing in breadth as they ascended. Mr. Edmund Getty, writing in that valuable work, *The Ulster Journal of Archaeology* (vol. 3, p. 15), states that he, too, had examined the fragments of one of those conical roofs and found that its foundation had been a similar framework. To give the authority of another esteemed local antiquary upon this point, the Rev. James O'Laverty, P.P. of Holywood, in his admirable *History of the Diocese of Down and Connor*, (vol.

3, p. 249), tells us that the marks left by the twigs used in forming the conical roof of the Round Tower of Antrim are still visible in the mortar within.

The apex of the roof in many of the Round Towers was finished with careful attention. In that of Devenish, Lough Erne, it consists of a single stone, chiselled to a cone. Instead of a conical roof, the Round Towers of Kildare and Cloyne have crenellated battlements, obviously modern. Some seem to have been surmounted by a cross; but the cross has disappeared, owing to violence or mischance. The one which crowned Ardmore Tower was shot down by a person firing at birds.

With a single exception, the Round Towers present no ornament externally, save on their doorways and upper window-opes. The exception is at Devenish Island, where the beautiful Round Tower (the finest in Ulster) has an elegant cornice, tastefully sculptured, and exhibiting four human heads, immediately below the eave-course of the roof, one over each attic window-ope. Mr. C. M. O'Keeffe, an accomplished archæologist, speaking of one of these stone heads in the *Ulster Journal of Archæology* (vol. 4, p. 272), says:—"It gives historians an idea of the personal appearance of the builders of our Round Towers, and realises the descriptions given to us by Livy, Plutarch, and Strabo, of the gigantic Celts (or Gaels) of whom Ammianus Marcellinus says:—"In the cast of their features there was something terrible.'"

In the interior walling of Ardmore Round Tower there are sixteen corbels, or projecting stones, placed at various heights: five of which are carved as grotesque heads. Some have conjectured that these were intended as rests for the tops of the ladders employed in ascending from loft to loft. Petrie, however, inclines (p. 399) to regard them as supports for shelves. There are projecting stones in the interior of Rattoo Tower also, and elsewhere.

Some of the Round Towers have been thrown off the perpendicular through the subsidence of the foundation. Archdall absurdly states that the overleaning of the specimen at Kilmacduagh is 17ft. It was found, by Brash, to be (p. 106) only 2ft. 4in. The Tower at Clones shows a considerable overleaning also.

The Round Towers were entered and quitted by means of a ladder; and provision was made for ascending to the several lofts. Doubtless, in many instances, this was accomplished with the help of a ladder also; but stairs were not

uncommon ; and it is plain, from indications in the interior of the Tower at Antrim, that in it, as the Rev. James O'Laverty remarks (vol. 3, p. 251), there was once a spiral staircase, reaching to the top story. Excavations, conducted by Mr. Edmund Getty, in 1842, within the foundations of the Round Tower of Trummery, brought to light portions of its dilapidated stone staircase. (*Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, vol. 3, p. 296). Dr. Reeves, writing of this Tower in 1847 (*Ecclesiastical Antiquities of Down, Connor, and Dromore*, p. 48), speaks of "a few spiral steps" as still remaining. The present writer inspected the foundations last autumn ; but all trace of the steps had long previously disappeared. He had expected to collect some information respecting this Tower ; and doubtless might have succeeded had he visited the place sooner ; for he learned, much to his regret, that a labourer, who had been in the Tower a few minutes before it fell, had only recently died at a great age.

Owing to the discrepancies which confront one in sundry works, it is difficult to state, with confidence, the precise number of Round Towers, intact or partially ruinous, at present in the island. Moore, in his *History of Ireland* (vol. 1, p. 34), says it is "generally computed" that there are fifty-six ; but he quotes a writer who estimates that there are sixty-two. An article in the *Dublin Penny Journal* (vol. 1. p. 9), places the number at sixty-five. Dr. Ledwich, in his *Antiquities of Ireland* (p. 167), prints a list of sixty-six Round Towers ; but in this list he includes the Round Tower which formerly stood at Downpatrick, notwithstanding that it had been levelled to the ground by the vandalism of one of the Marquises of Downshire in 1789,\* before the publication of his book. From Ledwich's list, one misses the Round Towers of Armoy, Kells, Tory Island, Aghaviller, Drumkleeve, Kilnaboy, Rosenallis, &c. The correct number is, therefore, more than sixty-six. However, it is certainly not one hundred and eighteen, as represented on a map published by the Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge ; nor yet ninety, as stated by a writer quoted by Mr. Getty in the *Ulster Journal of Archaeology* (vol. 3, p. 17). Eighty-three, the number given in Mr. and Mrs. Hall's *Ireland : its Scenery &c.* (vol. 3, p. 191),

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\* Dubourdieu (*Survey of Down*, p. 289) says 1790 : O'Laverty (*Down and Connor*, vol. 1, p. 277) and Reeves (*Ecclesiastical Antiquities of Down, Connor, and Dromore*, pp. 230 and 385) give the date in the text. Dubourdieu and Reeves devotedly conceal the noble Marquis's share in the above transaction ; but O'Laverty (*ubi supra*), not being a courtier, does not defraud him of his legitimate fame in connection with the matter.



is in excess also. There are, perhaps, seventy-six or seventy-eight, all told, not including instances where, as at Trummery, only the foundation remains. In Petrie's large volume on the Round Towers there is no mention of the number : a singular oversight.

Among the places where Round Towers formerly existed, we may enumerate Armagh, Downpatrick, Connor, Mahee Island, Brookmount, Trummery, Tomgraney, Ballykelly, Slane, Boyle, Rosscarbery, Annadown, Raphoe, Trim, Louth, &c. The fac-simile of a map of Carrickfergus, in the reign of Elizabeth, given in the *Ulster Journal of Archæology* (vol. 3, p. 276 ; see also vol. 4, p. 134), shows that there was one in that ancient town ; while an article in the *Dublin Penny Journal* (vol. 1, p. 9), states that a Round Tower formerly stood in so unexpected a place as " a court off Ship Street " in the city of Dublin.

If the Round Towers had now to be erected they would cost, according to size and style of architecture, in the opinion of Telford, from £300 to £400 each. This famous engineer regarded them with deep interest as affording early examples of lofty structures, built from within without scaffolding : a principle which has been widely acted upon in modern times in the construction of tall chimneys, with excellent results in point of economy.

Many intelligent persons are persuaded that no Towers, similar to those in Ireland, are to be found outside our island ; while others are satisfied that exact counterparts of our Round Towers have been discovered in Persia and India. Both opinions are erroneous. Similar Towers do exist outside Ireland ; but none fairly resembling them in the Oriental regions. In Scotland there are two :—One 74ft. high, at Abernethy ; the other 110 ft., at Brechin, "built," says Sir Walter Scott (*Edinburgh Review*, vol. 41, p. 148), "in imitation of the Round Towers in Ireland, under the direction of the Irish monks, who brought Christianity into Scotland." There is also one, 50ft. high, at Peel in the Isle of Man.

In England there are some Round Towers likewise. The ancient church of Hythe, in Kent, possesses one. It is probably a copy of ours, built by some English ecclesiastical pilgrim to Ireland or Irish missionaries to England. The resemblance is striking. An illustration of the Round Tower of Hythe is given in the *Ulster Journal of Archæology* (vol. 3, p. 27). There is a Round Tower at Beckley, Oxfordshire,

and a truncated one at Little Saxham. An illustration of the Tower at Little Saxham appears in Parker's *Introduction to the Study of Gothic Architecture* (p. 83). It is built of flint, as are several others, which abound in Norfolk and Suffolk. These have the elevated doorway and window-opes at intervals; but the conical roof is absent, except in the instance at Hythe, its place being supplied by a handsome crenellated battlement. All these Towers are connected with their respective churches, after the manner in which the Round Tower is united to the Ivy Church at Glendalough; for, in the advance of ages, the Round Tower ceased to be built separate and distinct from the churches, which, in all cases, are, or, at least, were in their immediate vicinity.

The belief that exact copies of our Round Towers may be seen in Persia and India has prevailed for a considerable time. Its chief propagators included forgotten travellers like Major Keppel, Mr. Jonas Hanway, merchant, and Lord Valentia. The Towers in which these indifferent observers espy this resemblance agree in hardly anything with the Irish Round Towers, except in the one feature of rotundity. Some of them present a thick-set appearance when compared with the supremely graceful outline of the tapering Round Towers of Ireland, *being three times the diameter* of those to which, it is said, they are so marvellously like. Others, again, display a round ball upon a spike at the top, to represent the sun: an emblem which seems not to have existed on any of our Towers. Some are built of brick, a material which has no place in the Irish Round Towers: others are embellished after a fashion unknown in this country. The two Towers at Bhaugulpore, and of which Lord Valentia gives an illustration in his *Travels*, (vol. 1, p. 85) have ten ornamental string-courses encircling each Tower at intervals between the ground and the summit: while the upper story is octagonal, a peculiarity not visible in the Round Towers of Ireland. Moreover, the attic window-opes, to all appearance, are several times larger than those in our Towers; and the roof consists of a little dome which is not of sufficient size to sit on the walls of the Tower, but rests rather oddly on the flat top. From the circumstance that in many of these Eastern Towers the doorway is elevated above the ground, as in the Irish Round Towers, an endeavour is made by some writers to lead readers to the conclusion that there is a perfect similarity between them. As well might it be insisted that the huge circular keep of Dundrum Castle is akin to the Irish

Round Towers ; for in it, too, the doorway, as is known to everyone who has ascended to the dismantled battlements, is elevated above the ground : whereas there is scarcely any structure that is, on the whole, so unlike one of the Round Towers of Ireland as the Castle of Dundrum.

As the skill of our early architects is attested by the design as well as by the great antiquity of the Irish Round Towers, deriding, as it were, in the majesty of their strength, the fierce wrath of the elements ; so, likewise, the marvellous pitch of perfection attained by our ancient masons in the building art finds witness in the successful resistance which some of the Towers have maintained against extraordinary shocks of violence. Out of several instances that might be cited in illustration, selection may be made of the Round Tower of Maghera, County Down, a secluded village about two miles from Newcastle. About the year 1711, this Tower was broken short at a height of some 20 ft. from the ground ; but in its very fall it furnished an almost miraculous proof of its durability. Nature, in her wrath, might prostrate but she could not destroy it. "It lay," says Walter Harris, an Irish antiquary of those days, "at length and *entire* upon the ground like a huge gun, *without breaking to pieces*, so wonderfully hard and binding was the cement in this work" (*Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, vol. 4, p. 131). Let each one picture to his imagination the extent of the strain upon the aged mortar as the huge mass, weighing hundreds of tons, thundered to its fall : while the rude collision with the earth was powerless to disturb a single stone from the bed in which it had been cemented a thousand years before. Within what now remains of Maghera Tower (20 ft.) there is a stout sapling growing, the product, doubtless, of some wind-blown seed. Its branches enable the explorer to climb to the top of the dilapidated structure. Dubourdieu (*Statistical Survey of County Down*, p. 289), writes in apparent ignorance or forgetfulness of the existence of this Tower.



## THE ORIGIN OF THE ROUND TOWERS. CHRISTIAN OR PAGAN ?

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Opinion, with respect to the origin of the Round Towers, falls within three categories. The first includes those enthusiastic writers and their adherents who see in the Round Towers Pagan structures rivalling the Pyramids of Egypt in hoary antiquity. The second embraces those authorities who will not concede to them a duration of untold centuries before Christ, but, on the contrary, contend that they belong to the Christian period of Irish history. The third consists of certain Pyrrhonists who conceive that nothing of an assured character has been, or is likely to be, arrived at touching the question. Among those who avow this despairing opinion one meets with regret the name of so accomplished a scholar as the renowned Dominican orator, the late Father Burke. In a magnificent lecture upon "The History of Ireland as told in Her Ruins," (p. 84) he asks:—"Who built all these Towers: for what purpose were they built?" and proceeds to answer thus:—"There is no record or reply, although the question has been repeated, age after age, for thousands of years." There is manifest hyperbole in the assertion that the settlement of the Round Tower controversy has perplexed man's ingenuity for so prolonged a period as "thousands of years:" an assertion which (to give it the most moderate interpretation) includes the incredible proposition that the history of these Towers was actually forgotten soon after the Deluge: and the writer is slow to believe otherwise of the great preacher than that he was carried away into involuntary extravagance upon this



occasion, when fired by the grandeur of his theme. Notwithstanding the weight of Father Burke's justly celebrated name, it will be seen in the sequel that there exists no good reason for the suggestion that the question of the Round Towers is involved in inexplicable mystery. Neither can this other statement of his be substantiated:—"Thousands of years have passed over their hoary heads." Not by so inadequate an authority as that of the present essayist is it proposed to prove this, but by adducing that of scholars who were Father Burke's superiors in the department of Irish antiquities, properly so called, however far they might have otherwise fallen behind him. It is too late to tell the world that history is a blank respecting the Round Towers when an Irish archæologist like George Petrie has shown that existing Irish records deal with them, and when the conclusions of this indefatigable investigator have been fully concurred in by John O'Donovan and Eugene O'Curry, authorities whose equals in the science of our antiquities this nation may not soon see again: while Petrie's volume has set the controversy about the Round Towers practically at rest, in the judgment of all judicious antiquaries since his time.

Are the Irish Round Towers monuments of Christian or Pagan art? This is the division of the subject which shall now command our attention. So far as is known, the first to broach the theory of a Pagan origin for the Round Towers was General Vallancey, who, in the latter part of the last century, exhibited in his own person the unwonted spectacle of a British officer enthusiastically addicted to the study of the Irish language and antiquities. In this belief he was followed, among others, by Dr. Lanigan, Thomas Moore, John D'Alton, and Sir William Betham; while Dr. Lynch, author of *Cambrensis Eversus*, Dr. Molyneux, Walter Harris, Sylvester O'Halloran, Dr. Milner, Dr. Ledwich, together with the great body of Irish antiquaries for the last forty years, have looked upon them as Christian works. The writers specified by name agree in this broad expression of opinion; but some of them entertained a diversity of views, compatible with this general one, and which shall be glanced at hereafter.

Against the theory which ascribes the Round Towers to the Pagan Irish there are arguments direct and indirect. To begin with the latter: it has yet to be shown that the Pagan Irish used lime cement in their stone structures; whereas lime cement was used in the construction of the Round Towers.

So far were our Pagan ancestors from employing mortar that the use of it, introduced with Christianity, spread slowly among even their Christian descendants, who, for nearly three centuries after St Patrick's advent, continued to erect many of their stone structures without it. "The earliest stone structures in Ireland," says Dr. W. K. Sullivan (*Introduction to O'Curry's Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish*, p. ccciii), "even those of early Christian origin, are built without mortar." The monastic cells in Inishmurry, Sligo Bay, and Inishglory, off the coast of Erris, County Mayo; St. Fechin's cell, at Ard-Oilean, off the coast of Connemara; St. Finan Cam's on Church Island, four miles north of Derrynane Abbey, County Kerry; St. MacDara's oratory on the Island of Cruach Mic Dara, off the coast of Connemara; also the beautiful oratory at Gallerus, County Kerry, in which the stones fit each other with an accuracy truly marvellous, so that the little edifice is water-tight, are all built of stone *without a particle of mortar*. These cells are mostly of a circular or oval form, encompassed by a wall of immense stones which retain their position by their mere weight alone, without cement of any kind. *Clochans*, as these cells are called, are exceedingly numerous in the west and south-west of Ireland. The Dingle district alone of County Kerry contains between seventy and eighty of them, all uncemented. Sometimes there is a substitute for mortar in the earliest of our churches. In the townland of Derry, not far from Portaferry, there may still be seen, side by side, the ruins of two most ancient churches, the stones of which are held together, as Dr. Reeves notices in his *Ecclesiastical Antiquities of Down, Connor, and Dromore* (p. 23), "with an adhesive kind of clay instead of mortar;" and speaking of the ancient church of Raholp, called Church-Moyley, this great authority says (p. 39):—"In building the walls, yellow clay has been used instead of mortar."

In not one of the numerous stone structures erected by the Pagan Irish, and still to be found scattered over the country, has the least trace of mortar ever been discovered. Take for instance the singular stone chambers within the sepulchral mounds at New Grange and Dowth by the Boyne, and other mounds: take the stone chambers discovered beneath our raths, as at Parkmore and Finvarra, County Clare, Kildun, and Caslough, County Mayo, Kilmichael and Kilcrea, County Cork, and numerous other places: take our great stone forts like the Grianan Aileach, near Derry, Staigue Fort, County

Kerry, and many others in the Counties of Clare, Galway, Mayo, &c., in some of which the walls are from 10 ft. to 25 ft. thick : in none of these Pagan remains is there the least mortar. The use of mortar then in the Round Towers is a strong presumption against their having been the work of the Pagan Irish. Again, in many of the Round Towers there are arches, more or less decorated ; while in none of the admittedly Pagan structures existing in Ireland is the arch to be found. But there is a stronger argument against the Pagan theory in the following circumstance, which the writer takes from Dubourdieu's *Statistical Survey of County Down*, (p. 289), though it is not applied in that work to the purpose to which it is now about to be converted. It is this : that when the Round Tower of Downpatrick was destroyed, in 1789, the Marquis of Downshire's labourers discovered what appeared to be the continuation of the wall belonging to the ancient church of that town. *This piece of wall ran right across the foundation of the Round Tower, a little below it ;* and in it the workmen unconsciously laid bare an argument against the theory which ascribes the Round Towers to the Pagan Irish. The wall must have been there longer than the Tower—since the Tower stood above it : in other words, the Tower was younger than the wall. Now, granting this wall to have been once connected with the ancient church at Downpatrick, the Tower, in that event, was manifestly erected in days when Christian churches had been already built in this island ; and so there is an end at once to the supposition that the era of our Round Towers extends back to the shadowy days of our idolatrous ritual. There is equally an end to it, even if this piece of wall had never belonged to the old church. The wall was, at all events, bound together *with mortar* : a fact which proves it to have been built *after* the conversion of the Irish. Consequently, the Tower, as having been erected over it, cannot have been put up in Pagan times.

Another argument against the Pagan theory was brought to light during excavations made within the Round Tower of Kildare by a clergyman named Browne, more than forty years ago. Beneath a flag which bore every appearance of being the original floor of the Tower, five or six coins were found, of the description known to the initiated as *Bracteati*, i.e., coins impressed on one side *only*. Numismatists dispute as to when coins of this sort began to be struck. Some authorities, apparently without sufficient reason, date their origin as late as the twelfth century. Others think that they



came into use in the tenth century : and some ascribe them to the seventh or eighth century of the Christian era. Even if we stretch a point, and suppose them to have at once found their way into Ireland so early as the seventh century—though excellent authorities date them much lower—we have good grounds for inferring that the Round Tower of Kildare was not of Pagan erection. The supporter of the Christian theory of the Round Towers accepts the facts of the discovery, and offers no improbable explanation of how these coins came to be deposited within the Round Tower of Kildare, when he says that they were put under the floor at the construction of the Tower, in accordance with a custom which still prevails with respect to new buildings of importance ; and he submits the fact of the admittedly Christian origin of these coins as proof that the Tower of Kildare was erected in Christian times. The theorist who looks upon the Round Towers as Pagan will experience immense difficulty in accounting for the presence of these few Christian coins beneath the floor of what he considers a Pagan structure. Had a *large number* been found, the Pagan theory might not have suffered by the discovery ; for the allegation might be made, with some probability, that the Tower, having been long disused, was well-adapted for the concealment of a treasure ; *but who would have gone to the trouble of raising the floor to hide five or six?* What plausible solution of their presence can be given if we reject the supposition that they were put in at the building of the Tower ? And if we accept this, we cannot deny that the Round Towers are Christian works.

A fourth indirect argument against the Pagan theory lies in this fact, that there is not in Ireland a single place which took its name from a Round Tower. Why is any importance attached to this suggestion ? Simply because our Pagan forefathers, in giving names to places, took special care to commemorate their various structures, earthen and stone, the *Rath*, the *Dun*, the *Lis*, the *Caiseal*, (Cashel), the *Cathair* (Caher), the *Brugh*, and so forth, compounding them with other native words to form the names of important places ; and is it to be thought that if they had been daily familiar with such superior structures as the Round Towers, they would have neglected to name some place, or places, after a Round Tower ? It may be argued that Tory Island, as a name, is anterior to Christianity : that there is a Round Tower on it : ergo the island received its name from *tor*, which is Irish, for “a tower.” Admitting all this, can it be proved, beyond a doubt, that the

island was called Tory Island, because of any *tor*, or "tower," erected by man? Or, rather, can it be disproved that Tory Island was so named because it abounds in lofty isolated rocks, known as *tors*, or towers? As Dr. Joyce remarks, in his *Origin and History of Irish Names of Places* (vol. 1, p. 400):—"The intelligent Irish-speaking natives of the Donegal coast give it this interpretation; and no one can look at the Island from the mainland without admitting that the name is admirably descriptive of its appearance?" As to the bardic narrative respecting an African general named Conaing, who built a Tower here, a few centuries after the Deluge, "it appears," says Petrie (pp. 14-15), "to be a legend originating in the natural formation of the Island, which presents, at a distance, the appearance of a number of Towers, and hence, in the authentic Irish Annals, and the Lives of St. Columbkille, the patron saint of the place, it is called *Torach*, or the Towy Island, and Latinised *Torachia* and *Toracha Insula*. It is true, indeed, there is a Round Tower still remaining on Tory Island, but it would require a more than ordinary share of credulity to enable one to believe that this is the Tor-Conaing of the Africans; or, that its age is anterior to that of St. Columba, to whom its erection is attributed by the common tradition of the islanders and the inhabitants of the opposite coasts." Conaing's Tower, moreover, is not said to have been *round*. If any structure at all was built by Conaing on Tory Island, it was, probably, one of those Cyclopean forts, of which remains still exist, and which are sometimes spoken of, in ancient authorities, as *tors*.

Our MS. records speak of Round Towers erected after Ireland had become Christian. For example, the *Chronicon Scotorum*, among the events which signalled the year 965, mentions the erection of the *cloictheach* of Tomgraney, *cloictheach*, or *cloigtheach*, being the common Irish word for a Round Tower. This was the earliest positive reference to the *erection* of a Round Tower which the industry of Petrie (p. 380), could discover in existing Gaedhelic MSS. But since the publication of Petrie's work, Eugene O'Curry in his incomparable *Lectures on the Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish*, (vol. 3, p. 46), has called public attention to a more ancient authority, which speaks of a Tower built in the seventh century by Gobban Saer, or Gobban the Builder, whom tradition makes the architect of so many. The MS. which O'Curry quotes is as old as the eighth century, and was written by Suibhne Geilt, who must have been

acquainted with Gobban Saer: for he was a member of St. Moling's religious community when Gobban Saer, the most famous of our ancient architects, built an oratory for that Saint. The language of this document was so obsolete that even O'Curry found difficulty in interpreting it.

An ancient MS. fragment, believed to be part of MacLiag's Life of Brian Borumha, preserved in Trinity College Library, speaks of that monarch in two passages as a builder of *cloictheachs* or Round Towers. "By him cells and churches were founded; and cathedrals and *cloictheachs* and oratories were built in it" [Ireland]. (*Ba lais do cumdaigiodh cealla 7 ecalsa, 7 do ronta daimliac, acus cloicthigi, 7 durthigi, innti*).<sup>\*</sup> One passage gives 32 (*dá chloicteach trichat*) as the total number of Round Towers erected and restored by him. Dr. Smith, in his *History of County Cork* (vol. 2, p. 409), refers to a manuscript, containing some annals of Munster, wherein it is stated that the Round Tower of Kinneh was built about A.D. 1015. Petrie (p. 394) has produced evidence of the erection of Round Towers, so late as the middle of the twelfth century, from an ancient Gaedhelic Antiphonarium, which prefaces a prayer for the soul of Donnchadh O'Carrol, prince of Oriel, with the statement that "in his time" (*Is 'n a aimsir*), among other things recited as accomplished, "churches were founded and temples and *cloictheachs* (Round Towers) were made." (*Ro cumdaighthea ecalsa, 7 do rontha teampaill 7 cloicthighi*). So late even as 1238, the Annals of the Four Masters say:—"The *cloictheach* of Annadown was erected." (*Cloictheach Eanaigh diin do dénamh.*)

The next point to be investigated is:—How soon after conversion did the Irish commence to build these structures? To the conclusion arrived at by Miss Margaret Stokes, in her valuable work *Early Christian Architecture in Ireland*, in which she ascribes the first Round Towers to about the year 890, the writer prefers that of Dr. Petrie and his fellow-labourers. In Petrie's opinion, it is not improbable that the oldest types extend back to the time of St. Patrick. He comes to this conclusion, not from direct documentary evidence, but from inference, which is not ill-grounded. His reasoning depends upon what shall be proved hereafter, namely, that the Round Towers were intended primarily as

<sup>\*</sup> In quoting works written in Irish, the essayist has preserved the ancient spelling customary at the date when each such work was composed. He has not considered himself at liberty to modernise what is venerable, with respect either to orthography or such contractions as 7 for *agus* "and."

belfries ; and may be thus abridged. From the most ancient Lives of St. Patrick, he finds that our Saint distributed, for the service of the church, bells which were too large to be hand-bells. He finds, furthermore, in the Tripartite Life of St. Patrick, ascribed to St. Evin in the sixth century, that St. Senell, of Kildare, was St. Patrick's bell-ringer : while a treatise upon our apostle's household, preserved in those valuable MSS., the Books of Lecan and Ballymote, speaks of St. Senell as St. Patrick's *aistire*. What were the duties of an *aistire* ? They included, according to an ancient authority, the office of ringing the bell belonging to a *cloictheach*, or Round Tower ; and from the fact that St. Patrick had a holy man, whose duties, as an *aistire*, would include the one just named, Petrie infers that *cloictheachs*, or Round Towers, existed here before St. Patrick's death. At all events, they were quite common in the sixth and seventh centuries. "Of this fact," says this distinguished archæologist (p. 385), "we have a striking evidence in the architectural character of many of the existing Towers, in which a perfect agreement of style is found with the original Churches, where such exist. As a remarkable instance of this, I may point to the Church and Tower at Kilmacduagh, the Tower and Churches of Glendalough, and many others which it is unnecessary here to name. Nor can I think the popular tradition of the country is of little value, which ascribes the erection of several of the existing Towers to the celebrated architect Goban, or, as he is popularly called, Goban Saer, who flourished early in the seventh century : for it is remarkable that such a tradition never exists in connection with any Towers but those in which the architecture is in perfect harmony with the Churches of that period, as in the Towers of Kilmacduagh, Killala, and Antrim. And it is further remarkable that the age assigned to the first buildings at Kilmacduagh, about the year 620, is exactly that in which this celebrated architect flourished." An unimpeachable authority, of the eighth century, has already been produced, ascribing the erection of one of our Towers to Gobban Saer by name. That such Towers existed in the days of St. Columba, we may gather from the tradition told by the natives of Tory Island, who ascribe to him the Round Tower which may be seen in that island ; and St. Adamnan, in his Life of St. Columba, quoted by Petrie (p. 387), refers to a monk, in St. Columba's time, as falling from the top of a building which, according to the narrative, seems to have been a Round Tower. The ninth and tenth centuries,



however, are regarded by Petrie as the probable date when the great majority of our Round Towers were built. Authorities, already adduced, prove that the era of their construction lasted till the thirteenth century. It cannot be doubted, in the opinion of this judicious antiquary, that the Round Towers of Trummery, Trinity Church (Glendalough), Dungen, and Tamlaghtfinlagan were "but little anterior to the thirteenth century." In all these cases the Round Towers were united to their respective churches. "Such deviations," says Petrie (p. 395), "from the ancient custom of keeping the belfries detached from the churches, are, in themselves, sufficient evidence that they belong to a later period; and their architectural peculiarities, in all these instances, satisfactorily prove the fact."

As reference is sometimes made to the *Annals of Ulster*, in the hope of showing that Round Towers, in great numbers, must have been erected in Ireland before her conversion, the writer esteems it worthy of a passing comment, as evidence of the illusory nature of the appeals which have been made to ancient authorities in support of the Pagan theory of our Towers. John D'Alton, in his *History of County Dublin* (p. 922), says:—"It is also worthy of notice that the *Ulster Annals* even mention the fall of no less than fifty-seven Round Towers in Ireland by an earthquake, A.D. 448." He had previously ventured upon a similar statement in his *Essay on the Ancient History of Ireland*. Seldom has one so baseless been put forth in the discussion of an important controversy. The *Annals of Ulster*, it is true, record the overthrow of fifty-seven Towers by an earthquake in 448, when St. Patrick had been only sixteen years labouring amongst us; but it is not said in the *Annals of Ulster* that these Towers were "Round," nor even that they were situated in Ireland. As a matter of fact, the Towers so spoken of were not situated in Ireland. The *Annals of Ulster* contain records of foreign events from foreign writers; and the passage which led D'Alton to suppose that he had the *Annals of Ulster* in favour of his view of the age of the Round Towers is, in reality, merely an extract copied *verbatim* from the Latin chronicler Marcellinus,\* regarding the fall, not of fifty-seven Irish Round Towers, but the fall of

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\* This Marcellinus is not to be confounded with Ammianus Marcellinus, the Pagan historian. The Marcellinus referred to above was an Illyrian Count, who flourished in Justinian's reign, and continued St. Jerome's *Chronicon*. (See Cave's *Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Historia Litteraria*, s.v. Marcellinus.)

fifty-seven Towers, of a shape not specified, situated in so remote a place as Constantinople! So much for the accuracy of Mr. D'Alton, B.L. To Petrie (p. 46), is due the merit of exploding this delusion.

Among the ridiculous speculations of which the Round Towers have been the fruitful occasion, there is probably none calculated to create so much surprise in the mind of a thoughtful student of history as that which attributes their origin to those wonderful architects, the Danes. Who originated this opinion the writer is unable to say; but that it had an existence, before the year 1639, is ascertained from its having been mentioned as the belief of some, by Sir James Ware, in his great work *De Hibernia et Antiquitatibus Ejus* (c. 29, p. 387), first published in that year. It is also mentioned as a current report in 1662, by Dr. Lynch,\* in his *Cambrensis Eversus* (vol. 2, p. 257). It obtained easy credence with Peter Welsh, the Franciscan friar, who adopted it in his *Prospect of Ireland*, printed in 1682: also with Dr. Molyneux, in his edition of Boate's *Natural History of Ireland* in 1727; and lastly, with Dr. Ledwich, in his *Antiquities of Ireland* (p. 159). Ledwich says:—"Let it now be remarked that the opinion of every author, who has spoken of our Round Towers for the space of 542 years, that is, from Cambrensis to Molyneux, is uniform in pronouncing them Ostman or Danish works." Lanigan (*Ecclesiastical History of Ireland*, vol. 4, p. 405), and Petrie (*Round Towers*, p. 10), have pointed out the stupendous effrontery of Ledwich, in venturing to assert that Giraldus Cambrensis ascribes the Round Towers to the Danes. Cambrensis declares them to be purely Irish. He expressly states that they were built *more patrie*: which means, "after the manner of the country." Petrie justly castigates what he

\* Lanigan (*Ecclesiastical History of Ireland*, vol. 4, p. 404) says:—"Lynch is, as far as I can discover, the first author who has mentioned the Danes as the builders of the Round Towers." Sir James Ware's somewhat earlier reference to this opinion, when speaking of a Round Tower in Cork, appears to have escaped this singularly fine scholar. It ought to be understood that Lynch does not give this opinion as his own, but only as a report (*dicuntur*): yet we frequently see writers laying it down that Lynch favoured the Danish theory himself. This is most unjust to Dr. Lynch. In another part of his great work, when refuting Giraldus Cambrensis upon the alleged ignorance of the early Irish with respect to the arts of life, he refers to the Round Towers as built by the Irish (vol. 2, p. 191). Had he believed that the Danes erected them, he would not have been foolish enough to adduce them against Cambrensis as proofs that the Irish were good masons. Most of the writers who defend Lynch against the charge of believing in this nonsense about the Danes, do so by indirect means. The clear passage alluded to seems to have escaped their notice.

describes as "the audacious mendacity" of Ledwich, who would imply that, in support of the Danish theory, there had been a long list of writers, of whom Cambrensis and Molyneux were but the first and last: whereas, for about 500 years a most singular silence had been preserved upon the subject. Dismissing Ledwich, an author, who was notorious in his day for this description of imposture, and reverting to the main question: the absurdity of the hypothesis, that the Round Towers were erected by the Danes, a mere scum of sea-robbers, who were unskilled in building, and whose proclivities prompted them to destroy, rather than to erect, is manifest, when it is recollected that no traces of similar Towers have been discovered in Denmark itself, or any part of northern Europe, or in Normandy, Sicily, or those other countries in which the Danes secured settlements, if we except England, where there are, indeed, a few Round Towers, belonging, however, to the most modern form of Round Tower architecture, being, as already stated, united to the Churches to which they respectively appertain, instead of being separate buildings, like the older specimens, and which have been satisfactorily ascertained to be referable to an epoch long subsequent to the Danish invasions. Moreover, no Round Towers are known to have existed in Waterford, Wexford, Limerick, and other places possessed by the Danes in Ireland: while such Towers do exist in many places throughout the country where a Danish force never had a footing. Ledwich himself seems to have felt the pressure of this difficulty; for he tries to obviate it by saying:—"The Ostmen *began* them, and they were *imitated* by the Irish." But, as Dr. Lanigan sagaciously remarks, in his *Ecclesiastical History of Ireland* (vol. 4, p. 406):—"To make us believe that the Irish imitated their bitterest enemies, would require more than his bare word." Molyneux endeavours to sustain the Danish hypothesis upon the score of a resemblance between *cloictheach*, the Irish word for a belfry, or Round Tower, and *clugga*, "a German-Saxon word that signifies a bell." He is well refuted by Lanigan (vol. 4, p. 406), who says:—"Cloghachd (*sic*) was formed from the Irish *cloc*, or *clog*, the very ancient name for a bell, and which was used by the Irish long before the German-Saxons had churches or bells. We find it Latinised into *clocca*, and it was used by Columbkille, and generally by the ancient writers as signifying a bell: so that, instead of giving Saxon etymology to *cloghachd*, the Saxon *clugga* was, most probably, derived from the *cloc*, or *clog*, of the Irish teachers of the Saxons."



The singular notion that the Danes built the Round Towers arose, perhaps, from their being confounded with the Dananns, a civilised race, who inhabited Ireland in remote ages ; although the Dananns could not have been the builders of the Round Towers either ; for they used no cement in their stone structures, as Petrie has proved in one of his admirable works—the *Essay on the Ancient Military Architecture of Ireland*.

Whence came the archetype of the Irish Round Towers ? One of the native names for a Round Tower, *cuilceach*, or *cuilctheach*, meaning literally, “a reed-house,” throws light upon the question. The late Canon Smiddy, of Aghada, County Cork, in his *Essay on the Druids, the Ancient Churches and the Round Towers of Ireland* (p. 200), says :—“There is growing in the bogs and rivers of Ireland, a large kind of *cuile*, or reed, with a conical head, which, in form and shape, resembles the lines of the Round Tower, and which, I am sure, was originally taken as the model for it. Anyone looking at the perfect Round Tower of Rattoo, in Kerry, and at the reeds growing in the water near it, must be, at once, struck by the great resemblance, in shape, which they bear to one another.” This is the best conjecture which has appeared upon the subject. In all probability, Canon Smiddy has indicated the true archetype. His conjecture becomes more assured, when we consider what he says in the following passage :—“Two kinds of the very remarkable large reeds, with conical heads, which served as model for the Towers, are to be found in Ireland. The one has several knots and joints on the stalk. This would be the model for the Round Towers which have offsets, or bands, on the external surface of the walls [to mark the stories]. The other has a clean, smooth stalk, and would be the model for the Towers exhibiting a smooth and even surface. This latter reed is the more common, and so is the reed-house, or Round Tower, which follows it as a model (p. 226).” Other authorities suggest, with less likelihood, that our Round Towers are traceable to Ravenna and its vicinity. There, semi-detached Round Tower belfries, built of brick, were common from the sixth century. In Italy they continued peculiar to this part ; but it is said that some of our first pilgrims to Rome, who were exceedingly numerous in the early ages of Christianity, introduced the pattern into Ireland on their return.



## THE USES OF THE ROUND TOWERS.

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OR what purpose were the Round Towers built ? This is a question upon which much diversity of opinion has prevailed. General Vallancey led, or, rather, misled, many to the belief that the Round Towers had been temples, of Phœnician or Indo-Scythian origin, devoted to the preservation and worship of sacred fire.

This solution of the problem was put forth in his *Essay on the Antiquity of the Irish Language*, originally published in 1772. Returning to the subject later on, he concluded that these structures had been bequeathed to us by certain Fomorians, or African sea-champions, who are said to have landed in Ireland a few centuries after the Deluge : while he took occasion to expatiate upon a number of further uses which he conceived these Towers to have been put to : surmising that the Druids danced round them to celebrate the revolution of the year and the recurrence of certain festivals ; also, that the Round Towers had been connected with sorcery. Eventually, however, he clung to the opinion that they had been Persian fire-temples. These fables and fancies might, perhaps, be deemed sufficiently refuted by the fact established, it is hoped, in the preceding pages, namely, that the Round Towers were not of Pagan origin at all ; and, therefore, could not have witnessed any of those joyous Druidic dances conceived in the heated brain of Vallancey : while sorcery was not practised by the Christian Irish ; and the Gentile fires had given place

to the paschal fires before the era of the Round Towers had begun. Nevertheless, before dismissing the fire-temple theory, a few specimens of the class of evidence, relied upon as demonstrating its truth, may be produced with advantage—as proofs of its weakness. Vallancey bases his solution of the Round Tower problem mainly upon false, or inconclusive, etymologies. Any inquirer, who may desire to see an extended panorama of Vallancey's blunders, is referred to Petrie's volume (pp. 12-28), in which the General is also convicted of garbling authorities to support his theory. The ordinary reader, however, will probably be content with two examples of the manner in which Vallancey has deluded the public, in his attempt to identify the Round Towers with fire-worship. To prove that the Round Tower of Balla had been a fire-temple, he changes the name of this place to "Beilagh," which, he says, means "the fire of fires"—of course, in allusion to the pretended purpose of these Towers. Unfortunately, however, for Vallancey, we learn from Joyce's *Origin and History of Irish Names of Places* (vol. 1, p. 75—see, also, Petrie, p. 453), that this place was known neither as Balla nor Beilagh, during the only time that could benefit Vallancey, namely, the Pagan period of our history. It did not receive its present name till the time of St. Mochua. This Saint, as appears from his ancient *Life*, erected a monastery there; and the place took the name of Balla, merely from the Balla, or wall, with which he, according to a common custom, surrounded it. Again, Vallancey was sure that the Round Tower of Aghagower had been a fire-temple, because, according to him, "Aghagower" means "the fire of fires" also. Its name, however, in Pagan times, happens not to have been Aghagower, but, as Joyce says, "Achadh-fobhair;" and "Achadh-fobhair" signifies, not "the fire of fires," but "the field of the spring." What support could the fire-temple theory derive from this? Its modern name "Aghagower," is equally unserviceable to Vallancey. "Aghagower" is the simplest of Irish, signifying "the field of the goat." The rest of his "evidence" is on a par with this. In taking leave of Vallancey, however, it would be unjust not to state that, after all, we owe him a debt of gratitude. Though not an Irishman, but of French descent and in the English service, he was stirred to enthusiasm by everything Irish. By his laborious example, his personal influence and fortune, together with his works, which are far from being valueless, he contributed to promote the study of our ancient language and literature at a very

dark and discouraging period; and, as for his personal knowledge in this much-neglected department, it were to be wished that every educated Irishman could vie with him.

Following Vallancey, several antiquarian delvers have laboured in the etymological mine with no little perseverance; and a great deal of very bad ore has been brought to the surface in consequence. One after another, they reiterate that the Round Towers have certainly been fire-temples, because places like Aghadoe, Taghadoo, Fertagh, Kinneh, &c., where such Towers were built, have, we are told, some reference to fire in their names. These statements, to the uninitiated so apparently conclusive, all turn out to be utterly baseless, when submitted to the test of an authority from which, on such a subject, there is no appeal, namely, Dr. Joyce's invaluable work:—*The Origin and History of Irish Names of Places*. From it, the inquirer will learn that the meaning of "Aghadoe" is not "the field of fire," as Vallancey's followers assert, but "the field of the two yew trees:" that "Taghadoo" means, not "the house of fire," but "the house (or Church) of St. Tua:" that "Fertagh" means, not "the sepulchral fire-temple," but "the place of graves:" that "Kinneh" means, not "the chief fire," but "the head of the horse." We are also told that Ardmore Tower is situated in a territory called Ardo, and that Ardo means "the height of the fire," pointing to the fact that the Round Tower was a fire-temple. In reply, it has first to be stated that the Round Tower of Ardmore is not situated in a territory called Ardo: there is no such territory adjoining: there is a gentleman's house of that name, and there are two townlands known as Ardochesty and Ardoguinnagh in the vicinity; but "even granting," as Petrie says (p. 82), "that Ardo was the name of the lands on which the Tower stands, it could not possibly signify 'the height of the fire,' or legitimately admit of any interpretation but 'height of the yew,' from *ard*, 'a height,' and *eo*, 'of the yew.'" As another proof of the truth of the fire-temple theory, we are told that the Round Tower of Rattoo, County Kerry, is locally known as *Giolcagh*, traced through *coil*, a Hindoo word for a "fire-temple," from the verb *chalana*, to burn. The resemblance is hardly apparent; but that is not to the purpose. *Giolcagh* is merely a corruption of *Cuilceach*; and *Cuilceach* is defined to mean "a steeple," by the learned Dr. O'Brien, in his Irish Dictionary. Thus the local name of the Round Tower of Rattoo, so far from proving the fire-temple theory, is suggestive of



the Christian use of the Round Towers, hereafter to be developed. Mr. and Mrs. Hall, in their pleasing volumes :—*Ireland : its Scenery, &c.*, have repeated these and kindred misinterpretations. But, although intelligent travellers and racy writers, Mr. and Mrs. Hall were not Irish antiquaries. Their dissertation upon the Round Towers contains many inaccuracies, of which the above etymologies are only specimens. For several of their errors, however, they were not personally responsible. They merely digested the material which they received from Mr. John Windele, of Cork, a gentleman who ought to have known better, he being what Mr. and Mrs. Hall were not.

It is great weakness to appeal, in support of the fire-temple theory, to the fact of some charred substance having been turned up in some Round Towers when the earthen floor was disturbed. Are we, of necessity, driven to account for its presence, by supposing that the Round Towers were fire-temples? Do we not know from history that the wooden floors and doors of these Towers were frequently burned by the Danes in order to destroy those persons who had taken refuge within? Do we not read of the hunted priest or rebel finding a temporary shelter in these Towers, and, perhaps, lighting his stunted fire on a wintry night? Are we to think that these individuals, like careful housewives sweeping the hearth, paused to remove the charred sticks ere they sped on in the morning? Have not boys amused themselves by kindling fires within these Towers? Indeed the present writer once saw within the ruined Round Tower at Maghera, near Newcastle, County Down, two little boys (youthful fire-worshippers!) enjoying themselves over a small fire of their own making, this Tower being easily entered, owing to the manner in which the masonry has been wrenched away at the door-sill. They were quite unconscious that they were manufacturing arguments for the possible Vallanceys of the future.

The unintentional transposition of a single letter in an Irish word, by an eminent Irish scholar, has given a plausible foundation to the fire-temple theory, thus :—*The Annals of the Four Masters*, as edited by Dr. Charles O'Connor, are made to contain the expression *Turaghan Angcoire* : an expression interpreted by the learned editor as signifying "the Fire-Tower of the Anchorite," implying, as it stands, that a certain Tower, supposed to have been a Round Tower, had been inhabited by a Christian hermit, having previously been a Pagan fire-temple. What is the fact? No MSS. containing this word *Turaghan* are known. No MS. even of the *Four Masters* con-

tains it. Dr. O'Connor had no authority for printing it as part of the text of these Annalists. The true reading is *Truaghan Angcoire*, instead of *Turaghan Angcoire*, *Truaghan* meaning "the Miserable," and being a cognomen of the anchorite Coscrach, whose death, A.D. 898, is chronicled in the passage in question. It has been thought that Dr. O'Connor, finding the first syllable of *Truaghan* contracted thus *Tr.*, as it appears written in the copy of the *Four Masters* preserved in the Royal Irish Academy, involuntarily placed the vowel *u* between these consonants instead of after them. All MS. copies of the *Four Masters*, which give the word in full, read *Truaghan*, instead of Dr. O'Connor's *Turaghan*. But, even if there were no MSS. against Dr. O'Connor, his reading stands discredited, upon grammatical grounds, as Dr. O'Donovan has shown in a communication addressed to Petrie. O'Reilly, author of the well-known Irish Dictionary, has also decided against Dr. O'Connor in the matter. (See Petrie's *Round Towers*, pp. 50-52.)

The following is another instance of how the fire-temple theory has been supported. Miss Beaufort, in her *Essay on Irish Architecture and Antiquities*, states that, A.D. 79, it was ordained at Tara, "that the sacred fire should be exhibited from the Tower of Thlachtga, in Munster, and from all other repositories on 31st October. \* \* \* It was also enacted that a Tower for fire should be built in each of the other provinces of Connaught, Leinster, Meath and Ulster." For these statements, this lady refers to the *Psalter of Tara*, as cited in Comerford's *History of Ireland*, not having herself examined Comerford's work, but professing to quote it from the *Parochial Surveys*. Petrie (pp. 38-39) has printed a long extract from Comerford, which shows that the enactment made at Tara had regard not to the *Tower* of Thlachtga (there being no Tower there), but to the *palace* of Thlachtga, and that the buildings which were ordered to be erected in Connaught, Leinster, Meath. and Ulster were also *palaces*—not Round Towers. Miss Beaufort likewise states that the *Psalter of Cashel* distinctly mentions the purpose of the Round Towers as being "the preservation of the sacred fire;" and D'Alton repeats her assertion. "He," says Petrie (p. 42), judiciously refers us to Miss Beaufort's *Essay*, and that lady refers us to the inferior authority of a *Parochial Survey*, and that, again, in regular progression downwards, cites an *Bridged History* of no character, in which, after all, no such statement is to be found! Where the *Psalters* of Tara and

Cashel are, no one knows. No grounds exist for the fond belief that the sacred fires were lighted within the Round Towers. On the contrary, a fact recorded in the venerable *Glossary* of Cormac MacCullenan, the prelate-king, is fatal to such a supposition. Describing the *Bell-tinne*, or sacred fires, he says :—"They (the Druids) used to bring the cattle between them against the diseases of each year." (*Ocus do bherdis na cetra etura ar tedhmanduibh cecha bliadhna*. Petrie, p. 37). From this we infer that the sacred fires were in an open place. It will be time enough to admit that the Irish Round Towers were the receptacles of the sacred fires when some ingenious person can show how cattle could be introduced into a Round Tower, much less pass between two fires, kindled in such a structure. Even if the doorways were on the level, as they are not, they are so narrow that the leanest of Pharaoh's lean kine could not get more than its head in. There is excellent reason to believe that the sacred fires were lighted on the hill-tops.

Those who hold that the Round Towers were fire-temples are entitled to explain why there are two or more Round Towers in one place. It is not suggested that any congregation assembled in these pretended fire-temples. The temple was merely for the priests and the fire, the people remaining outside : so, one Round Tower, if the Round Towers were fire temples, would have served a populous district. Now, there are two Round Towers at Clonmacnois, not many yards asunder. In the valley of Glendalough there are four, in various stages of preservation : one, the great Tower, standing apart; the remains of two built against Churches; and a small one, on the top of St. Kevin's Kitchen. There was, formerly, a fifth Round Tower at Glendalough. Five Pagan fire-temples together, and one of them actually *on the top of a Christian Saint's oratory*, notwithstanding that Christianity superseded idolatry in this country ! Sooner than restrict those who were partial to fire-worship, in the number of fire-temples, St. Kevin surrendered the gable end of his "Kitchen," lest a site (we may also say a *sight*) should be wanting ! What a rebuke to the discord and discourtesy of modern sects ! We shall not witness the return of such delightful harmony, in matters religious, till the Pope shall consent to let a "Little Bethel" be built on the roof of St. Peter's at Rome, and the Dean of St. Paul's license the Salvation Army to hold "Holiness Meetings" in the Whispering Gallery of the Cathedral. Can there be soundness in this fire-temple theory ? Must



there not be "something rotten in the state of Denmark?"

Against the fire-temple theory, there is also the fact that the Druids never allowed the hammer or chisel to touch any stones connected with their religious rites, as Canon Smiddy says (p. 42): whereas, in many of the Round Towers the stones are hammer-dressed, and, in some of them, chiselled still further, within and without, to the due curve.

Lanigan, Moore, and D'Alton were among Vallancey's followers in regarding the Round Towers as fire-temples. This theory falling to the ground, the expression "pillar-temple," so often applied to the Round Towers, should be rejected as a misnomer.

Connected with Gentile rites, there is another pretended solution of the purpose of the Round Towers, known as the phallic theory. Its author, or, at least, defender—for some say he did not originate it—was Henry O'Brien. This theory, however, cannot be discussed, for the reason that it has reference to an obscene worship alleged to have polluted Ireland in remote ages. Suffice it to say that O'Brien, by his unsavoury speculations, advanced without authority, never founded a school of opinion upon the question. Almost his only scholarly adherent was Sir William Betham, who appears to have patronised O'Brien to revenge himself for the criticisms of Petrie. Father Prout may seem to have entertained a great respect for O'Brien's solution of the Round Tower problem; but, a careful comparison of all the passages in which he alludes to it, will, the writer believes, suggest the suspicion that Father Prout, in expressing an extravagant admiration of O'Brien's conjecture, was only playing off one of his numerous hoaxes upon public credulity. Mr. Philip Dixon Hardy, publisher, Dublin, refused to print O'Brien's book upon any terms, having found it, as he says, "at once an indecent, incongruous, and, in many instances, blasphemous publication." (*Dublin Penny Journal*, vol. 2, p. 362.) Marcus Keane has revived some of O'Brien's peculiar Irish antiquarianism.

The Round Towers have, by some theorists, been looked upon as astronomical observatories or military watch-towers. No theory of the Round Towers can be the correct one, if an insuperable objection to it can be drawn from the circumstances surrounding even a single one of the existing specimens. They were evidently built for a uniform purpose; and, if a theorist, in face of any one Tower, confess that it is not adapted to his theory, then the solution of the riddle,



so far as he is concerned, is as remote as ever. The true theory will suit all the Towers. Keeping this principle in sight, would structures, erected for such purely secular purposes as those of warlike defence, or astronomy, have been built like the Round Towers of Cashel, Trummery, Dungiven, Tamlaghtfinlagan, and those of three Churches at Glendalough, viz. :—Trinity Church, the Ivy Church, and Saint Kevin's Kitchen? In all these instances, the Round Tower and the Church were united by the builder in such a manner that the Tower was part and parcel of the Church itself, and was entered through the Church. Seeing the difficulty in which this places him, the advocate of the astronomical, or military theory, may think to evade it by suggesting that the Round Tower might well be older than the Church now attached to it; and what, then, is to prevent these Towers from having been once astronomical observatories, or military watch-towers? This will be no answer, so far as the small Round Tower of St. Kevin's Kitchen is concerned; for, it must have been either *coeval* with the main building, or *subsequent* to it, being built on the top of one of the gables. In this case, therefore, the improbability of either the astronomical or the watch-tower theory, is manifest. But, perhaps, the objection against a secular purpose, drawn from the fact that some Round Towers are close against the sides of Churches, may be obviated, if we suppose that the Tower, in each such case, is *older* than the Church? The supposition may be made; but, whoever makes it, is logically bound to explain how it came to pass that, when these Churches were built, they were put *right up against* such uncongenial structures as astronomical observatories or military watch-towers, especially where there was room enough to keep them *at a distance*. Again: would no more suitable place have been chosen for astronomical observatories or watch-towers than the depths of a valley, like Glendalough, where the great Round Tower, which stands apart, and the three smaller ones attached to Trinity Church, the Ivy Church, and St. Kevin's Kitchen, are hemmed in by lofty mountains? Would the obviously better site afforded by the surrounding heights have been so singularly neglected for an inferior one? Or, if the Round Towers had been designed to be astronomical observatories, or military watch-towers, would two have been required in close proximity, as at Clonmacnois? Would four, as at Glendalough, where there once were five—even had the site been favourable? Finally, to disprove the astronomical theory,

even where there are four window-opes in the uppermost story, these, as at Ardmore and Cashel, for example, do not always face the cardinal points : where there are but two, as at Temple Finghin, they look north and south : while, in cases where the builder placed six, as at Kilmacduagh, or eight, as in O'Rourke's Tower, Clonmacnois, not one of them faces due north, south, east, or west. It need hardly be insisted that a structure, from which one cannot accurately observe the cardinal points, was not erected in the interest of astronomy. Nor can we suppose that the convenience of the astronomer, or, for that matter, the military watchman, was much consulted in the building of narrow apertures, some only a foot wide, in the top chamber : while the difficulty of seeing out is considerably enhanced by the circumstance that, at this point, the walls are from two to three feet thick.

Dr. O'Connor's juggling with the Irish word *Fidhneimhedh*, which he, by an odd process of induction, interprets as "an astronomical gnomon," applying it to the Round Towers, assuming that it is so used in Irish records, is exposed in a masterly manner by Petrie. He has proved (pp. 56-64), by an overwhelming weight of evidence, that *Fidhneimhedh* has no reference to gnomons, or Round Towers either. It means those "sacred trees," or "trees of the sanctuary," which were a usual embellishment in the vicinity of our ancient churches, having been sometimes planted by the founders.

Dr. Lanigan (*Ecclesiastical History of Ireland*, vol. 4, p. 407), while holding that the chief purpose of the Round Towers was to be fire-temples, believed that the upper story was intended for an astronomical observatory. Peter Welsh, the Franciscan (*Prospect of Ireland*, p. 417), thought that they were designed as watch-towers by the Danes. This notion is, however, older than his time : for, in a plan of Clones, published in Elizabeth's reign, the Round Tower there is marked as a "watch-toure." A facsimile of this plan is published in the *Ulster Journal of Archaeology* (vol. 3, p. 29). Dr. Lynch, the author of *Cambrensis Eversus*, is usually spoken of as one who believed the Round Towers to have been watch-towers. If the present writer might venture to differ from scholars greater than himself, he would suggest, with all deference, that, perhaps, Lynch has been misrepresented in the matter. In the following passage, seldom or never quoted, Lynch says :—"In later ages, those slender, high, and round pillar-towers, which still stand near most of the Cathedral Churches of Ireland, began to be erected of

stone, and *used as belfries*, after the invasions of the Danes." (*Construi e saxo, et pro campanilibus haberi cæperunt, Danis huc appulsis.* Vol. 2, pp. 190-191.) Their use, as belfries, is here made to coincide, in point of time, with their erection. This seems to be his definite opinion. Elsewhere, in the same work, (vol. 2, p. 257), there is a passage which is generally cited as giving Lynch's view of the original purpose of the Round Towers, but which seems, when carefully considered, to be, after all, only his account of a mistaken report. In it, he says :—"The Danes . . . are said (*dicuntur*) to have first erected those small, slender, cylindrical towers, not for belfries, but watch-towers;" that is to say, those who believed the towers to have been erected by the Danes, as *Lynch certainly did not* (see p. 33, of this pamphlet), held that they had been intended as watch-towers, not belfries. There seems to be no warranty in this, for the statement that Lynch, *personally*, believed the Round Towers to have been built as watch-towers. What follows in the same place :—"In course of time, the custom was introduced of hanging bells in the top of them, and using them as belfries," appears to be only the sequel of the report, and not Lynch's own sentiments, which are distinctly stated in the passage first quoted. The writer is not aware that any previous attempt has been made to vindicate Lynch in the matter. Even Lanigan and Petrie assume that Lynch adhered to the watch-tower theory.

That the Round Towers were intended as beacons is a supposition unsupported by authority. The low situation of many of them, as at Glendalough, Abernethy, &c., effectually disposes of it. Moreover, as Dr. Milner says :—"The apertures at the top of them are not large enough to transmit any considerable body of light, being very different in this respect from our modern light-houses." (*Inquiry, &c.*, p. 134). While combating the opinion that our Towers were expressly designed as watch-towers or beacons, the writer does not deny the possibility of some of them having been occasionally put to one or both of these uses, when found erected under suitable conditions. Either theory may be accepted in this limited sense. Their height, for instance, may have suggested the turning of such of them as happened to occupy commanding sites into watch-towers in seasons of trouble; and, as regards their having been sometimes converted into beacons, few will dissent from the observations of the ever-judicious Petrie, who says (p. 378) :—"In like



manner, if we consider the usages of the monastic establishments to which these Towers belonged, the hospitality and protection which they afforded to travellers and strangers in times when roads were few, and the country generally covered with wood, we will find it difficult to resist the conviction that the Towers would be used at night, as beacons, to attract and guide the benighted traveller, or pious pilgrim, to the house of hospitality or prayer." It appears, from Mabillon's *Iter Germanicum*, that the Irish monastery, founded by St. Columbanus, at Luxeuil, in Burgundy, had a beacon-tower—a circumstance which seems to countenance the above conclusion; but Petrie says:—"A most careful examination of our ancient MSS. has led to no discovery that would give it certainty."

Mr. Hodder M. Westropp, in a paper published in the *Ulster Journal of Archæology* (vol. 9, pp. 171-176), offers the conjecture that the Round Towers "were erected in cemeteries, as memorials of the dead, and were used as beacons to guide funeral processions to the churchyards, the lights in the Tower serving also as a signal to recall to the passers-by the presence of the departed spirit, and to invoke their prayers. \* \* \* The purpose of the lamp was to light, during the night, funeral processions which came from afar, and which could not always reach the burial ground before the close of day." Mr. Westropp produces no documentary evidence in his favour; but, finding that in the French cemeteries in the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries there were Towers—some of which were round and others square—devoted to the above uses, he supposes that our Towers, none of which are square, are copies of the French Towers, and were built for a similar purpose. One cannot, however, conceive how the Round Towers of Ireland—some of which must have been *ancient* when Giraldus Cambrensis visited this country in the latter part of the twelfth century—for, inferentially, he speaks of them as such in his *Topographia Hiberniæ* (Dist. 2, c. 9, p. 720)—could have had an archetype in the French *Fanaux de Cimetière*, which only *began* to be constructed at the end of the eleventh century, according to De Caumont's *Cours d' Antiquités Monumentales*, quoted by Mr. Westropp himself.

The conjecture that the Round Towers may have been the habitations of solitaries was originated in the seventeenth century by Dean Richardson of Belturbet, and has been adopted by Walter Harris, Dr. Milner,



Dr. O'Connor, Sylvester O'Halloran, and Edward King, author of *Munimenta Antiqua*. Harris, who was unacquainted with our native language, asserts, on the authority of an anonymous person, whom he characterises as "a skilful critic in Irish," that *cloch angcoire*, which means "the stone of the anchorite," was applied to a Round Tower. No evidence that *cloch angcoire* was so applied has been discovered. *Cloch angcoire*, as Dr. O'Donovan says (Petrie, p. 115), is applied, in our ancient *written* language, to an anchorite's cell, and in the language, *as spoken*, to the anchorite himself. Many such cells exist to this day in the western and south-western counties, and in the adjacent islands. They are built, as previously noticed, of uncemented stone, shaped like bee-hives, and known as *clochans*. It is pretty certain that Harris reported the popular tradition inaccurately, when he represented the Round Tower of Drumlane, County Cavan, as once the abode of an anchorite: for the popular tradition, as told to Mr. Getty, was, that an anchorite had, in ancient times, inhabited a cell, the ruins of which were in the vicinity. (*Ulster Journal of Archæology*, vol. 3, p. 24). Dr. O'Connor refers to certain passages, without precisely quoting them, in the *Annals of Ulster* and the *Annals of Innisfallen*, as if they spoke of anchorites dwelling in the Round Towers: "yet," says Petrie (p. 52), "in neither place is there a word to support that hypothesis." It is hard to imagine how any scholar could have conceived a resemblance between our Round Towers and the pillars upon which St. Simeon Stylites and his imitators passed their lives in the East; or could suppose that our Round Towers were for a similar purpose. The pillar-saints dwelt on solid columns, varying, in height, from 9 ft. to 60 ft., without a roof over their heads: our Towers are hollow, roofed, and ascend from 50 to 140 ft., or thereabouts. Who expended £300 or £400 of our money—for this is what each Tower would cost—to build a habitation for a mortified devotee? Is it not preposterous, moreover, to fancy that an ascetic, given to subduing the most clamorous wants of the flesh, would, after abandoning the world's pomps, voluntarily furnish such a proof of pride as to esconce himself in either the Round Tower of Kildare, or that of Timahoe, where the carvings upon the doorways are executed in the highest perfection of art?

A very silly theory is that which makes the Round Towers to have been penitential prisons. It was first promulgated by Dr. Charles Smith, the historian of the Counties

of Cork, Waterford, and Kerry, in the last century: a writer who changed his opinions more than once respecting the Round Towers. The penitential theory has also been adopted by the celebrated architect, Sir Richard Colt Hoare. Smith himself finally abandoned it. However, in his *History of County Cork* (vol. 2, p. 408), he says:—"The uses to which our ancient MSS. put these Towers was to imprison penitents." The sinner, according to Smith, when commencing his penance, was placed in the top chamber, and, "having made a probation of a certain number of days," he was indulged in the wonderful privilege of descending to the story beneath him, there to undergo further spiritual purification; and so on (or, rather, down), till he issued out at the doorway! Smith had no knowledge of the Irish language; and, as for his MSS., three such authorities as Petrie, O'Donovan and O'Curry knew nothing of them, and were satisfied that no such MSS. ever had an existence. (Petrie's *Round Towers*, p. 119; also, *Ulster Journal of Archæology*, vol. 3, p. 23.) None of the old Irish Penitentials extant—and we have Penitentials by SS. Cummin, Finian, Columbanus, and others—breathe a hint of the penance suggested by Smith. Possibly he was the victim of some wag. Only imagine structures like the Round Towers, built with no more practical object than to afford an opportunity of doing, high up in the air, acts of mortification, which could be as effectually performed on the surface! What hardship could it have been to come down by a ladder, or staircase, from the top story to the one below it, and so on, through six or eight stories? Could it have been that, through sympathy for fallen Oscar Wildes, the architect exhausted his decorative skill upon the doorways of the Round Towers of Kildare and Timahoe, so that there might be something æsthetic about the "penitenteries" set apart for individuals of *haut ton*? It is possible. Would plain Towers, like those of Antrim and Drumbo, have been the "penitenteries" of the *profanum vulgus*, upon whom, as persons dead to refinement, it was not so imperative to expend the conceptions of art? To be sure, they would! There is method in this madness.

In 1871, the late Canon Smiddy advanced a new theory in his learned *Essay on the Druids, the Ancient Churches, and Round Towers of Ireland* (pp. 189-242). He pronounced the Round Towers to have been baptisteries. He showed that the baptisteries, in early Christendom, were distinct structures and generally round; but made no attempt to demonstrate

that that they resembled our Towers in other respects. He seems to have been first led to formulate this theory by the fact that the name of a Round Tower, with many of the Irish-speaking peasantry, is *cuilceach* or *cuilctheach*, which literally means "a reed-house," the Towers resembling, in their outline, as before-mentioned, a species of Irish reed, bearing a conical top; the reed being emblematic of St. John the Baptist. Canon Smiddy's conjecture is beset with difficulties. He has identified, to his own satisfaction, the basement story of the Round Tower as the scene of baptism; but fails to explain why a baptistery should be 100, 120, or 130 feet high, and upwards, when the whole ceremony took place, according to him, in the basement chamber, only a few feet high, which, being all that was used, was all that was necessary. We cannot accept, as serious, the suggestion that the Round Towers were made thus unnecessarily lofty, as baptisteries, with no more practical object than to resemble a reed, the emblem of St. John the Baptist. He also fails to explain why a baptistery should possess from three to eight stories, as the Round Towers do. In substance, he states in his *Appendix* (p. 251), that Noah's Ark, which had three stories, and an elevated doorway, was emblematic of baptism: hence, stories, and an elevated doorway, were placed in the Round Tower, which, he says, was a baptistery. Why three stories in Noah's Ark should suggest four, six, or eight, in a Round Tower, is, perhaps, not apparent. Canon Smiddy, beyond this, is not able to show any utility in thus subdividing a mere baptistery, especially when he himself confines the ceremony to the lower chamber. We must just take it that these stories were put in, because Noah's Ark, which had stories, was the emblem of baptism: therefore, a certain similarity should exist between them. The similarity is but small. It is far, too, from being historically clear that Noah's Ark was like a Round Tower. Moreover, if any physical resemblance had been deemed necessary between a baptistery and Noah's Ark, the emblem of baptism, why was not the baptistery—supposed, by Canon Smiddy, to have been, in Ireland, a Round Tower—a perfect imitation of Noah's Ark? Why were only detached features, like stories and the elevated doorway, represented?

Again, he says (*Appendix*, p. 249):—"In an ancient rubric of the Church, it is recommended that, when convenient, a figure of St. John the Baptist, baptizing Christ, would [should] be put on the baptistery. It is on the Round

Tower of Brechin." Therefore, in his estimation, the Round Towers were baptisteries. Now, what is sculptured on the Round Tower of Brechin is not exactly St. John the Baptist, baptizing Christ, but, as the learned Canon himself says, in another place (p.208), "a figure of St. John the Baptist, holding a lamb in his arms, and a cup in his hand." This is on one side of the doorway: on the other side is a second figure—perhaps intended for Christ—but not near enough to St. John, when relative proportion is considered, to suggest the act of baptism. Further, Canon Smiddy appears to have forgotten that *no such emblem, as that recommended in the rubric, or that sculptured on the Tower at Brechin, is on any of the Irish Round Towers.* Some few display such emblems as the cross or the crucifixion; but there are dozens of them which show no carved emblem whatever. How can the emblem on the Round Tower of Brechin, suggestive of baptism, prove that those numerous Round Towers which have not got it, or *any* emblem, were baptisteries? Had the Round Towers been baptisteries, the recommendation of the above-quoted rubric would have been rigidly respected, by a nation that carried carving to great perfection—witness our beautiful ancient crosses—and the very fact that the prescribed emblem is not to be found on any of our Towers, must go far to discredit the baptistery theory. Even because the majority of baptisteries in Christendom were sculptured, in accordance with this rubric, it will not, of necessity, follow that the Tower at Brechin was a baptistery. What was to prevent the emblem at Brechin from being placed on *any* ecclesiastical structure?

In further support of his theory, Canon Smiddy adduces (p. 234), from the Order of Baptism contained in the Stowe Missal, the words:—*Descendit in fontem*, inferring therefrom that the priest went down into the basement chamber to the font, where the catechumen was baptized by immersion. But some of the Round Towers were built without any basement chamber, its place being occupied by solid masonry. Could these have been baptisteries, according to Canon Smiddy? Such descending to the font, as he describes, could not take place in them. We may now leave the baptistery theory. As fire has had its advocates in connection with the uses of the Round Towers, it was to be expected, perhaps, that some one would espouse the claims of water.

Were the Round Towers mausoleums? Henry O'Brien supplemented his phallic theory with the supposition that they



were. Sir William Betham, Mr. Getty, and Mr. Brash inclined to the sepulchral theory; and the South Munster Society of Antiquaries became seriously enamoured of it, fifty years ago. Excavations became the order of the day, wherever even the ruins of Round Towers existed. Only in one instance did any practical good attend so much labour. This was at Antrim, where Mr. Getty, in 1843, discovered the masonry of the base to be very unsafe: "so much so," to quote his own words, "that the Tower had quite the appearance of having been built on a cairn of stones, without the use of mortar." (*Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, vol. 4, p. 133). After "several tons of loose stones had been thrown out," the exploration was abandoned; and Sir Charles (then Mr.) Lanyon, C.E., who was present, recommended that the interior of the foundation should be carefully filled up with solid masonry, well grouted. Mr. Getty's claim to have been instrumental in preserving this fine Round Tower to posterity, together with the care taken of it by Mr. Clarke, in whose demesne it stands, merit recognition from every lover of Irish antiquities.

The Round Towers of Kinneigh and Cashel were ascertained to have been founded upon a rock, under circumstances which showed that, to make them mausoleums, did not enter into the calculations of the builder. No bones were discovered under the Round Towers of Antrim, Devenish, Mahee Island, Downpatrick, Kildare, and other places. From beneath that of Ardmore, two imperfect skeletons were taken: one minus the *head and feet*, and the other, the *entire trunk*. At Drumbo, another imperfect skeleton was dug up. It wanted the *right arm and hand, and the legs, from the knees downwards*. Other mutilated relics of humanity were disinterred from beneath the Round Towers of Armoy, Clones, Roscrea, Trummery, and elsewhere. (Petrie's *Round Towers*, p. 88: *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, vol. 4, pp. 67-74). In some instances, the bones found were those of dogs, pigs, &c. As regards the matter at issue, the discovery of human bones is not conclusive. Skeletons have been brought to view ere now, from beneath the foundations of old houses which contractors were taking down: yet, it is not a natural consequence that such dwellings were built for a monumental purpose. To establish the mausoleum theory, it should, at least, be proved that the erection of those Towers, beneath which human remains were found, was coeval, or nearly coeval, with the interment. What assurance have we that all the above remains were not

buried ages before the erection of the Round Towers, which stood over them? Moreover, why were such remains *invariably found mutilated*? Let us consider this point. Where human remains existed beneath Round Towers, it is not improbable that the interment took place long before there was a Round Tower in the vicinity; and that the remains were mutilated to make room for the foundations. Confessedly, all the remains were interfered with; and interference, amounting to mutilation, seems inconsistent with a monumental design in the erection of the Round Towers. Had the Round Towers been sepulchral monuments, the builder would have had full knowledge regarding the exact situation of the remains; and would have so laid out the base of the Tower as to include the entire body, symmetrically, within it. How did it happen, if the Round Towers were monumental, that the builder never, by any chance, cleared both the head and feet of the body, but, in some cases, cut off the entire trunk; and, in others, the legs, from the knees down? This must prove a difficult question for the advocate of the mausoleum theory to answer. But, supposing that the Round Towers were *not* intended as mausoleums, we can easily account for the existence, beneath some of them, of human remains in a mutilated condition, thus:—The Round Towers being almost invariably built in ancient graveyards, the builder, when excavating for the foundations, discovered a skeleton, or skeletons, which, owing to position, would lie partly *within* the proposed circumference of the Tower, and partly *outside*. What was he to do? Abandon operations—at least, there? No: because, go where he would, within the limits of the graveyard, the result of new excavations might be similar. Making the best of circumstances, and with that reverence for the dead which characterised the ancient Irish, he would disturb, we may suppose, only so much of the skeleton as would interfere with his wall—say the legs, for instance—and the remains having become disjointed, through lapse of time, he would re-inter such separated portion on the outside. Had Round Towers been erected as monuments, it is hard to conceive that the body of an individual, who was thought deserving of such a monument, would have been unceremoniously thrust into the earth, without a stone vault to protect it. Out of all the instances of human remains turned up from beneath Round Towers, only once were such found in a vault. This was at Trummery, near Moira. Let us try to ascertain when this vault was built. Of the remains found at Trum-

mery, certain members occupied a most unnatural position with regard to each other. The spine, with pelvis attached, a thigh-bone, an arm-bone, and a rib, lay *side by side*; and the skull, instead of being in a direct line with the spine, was at a *considerable distance*, and had an arm-bone *beside it*. A line drawn from that portion of the skull where it joins the neck, would, instead of meeting the top of the spine, have met it at the middle, *at right angles*. This unnatural arrangement of the members is suggestive of the remains having been a long time in the earth—long enough to become disjointed—when the vault was built, in which they were found. They were, apparently, arranged thus, by human hands, at the building of the vault; and, under the circumstances, could the vault have been built to be the receptacle of the body, when the body was *whole and intact*? Apparently, there was no vault for the body when it was first interred. Therefore, the vault was not built in the ordinary manner of sepulchres. The remains may have been discovered, by chance, in the graveyard, when the workmen were excavating for the foundations of the proposed Tower, and the vault built about them. At least, upon this supposition, we can account for the singular arrangement of the bones, dismembered by long interment: while the singularly unnatural arrangement of the bones cannot be well explained, if we suppose that the vault was constructed under the ordinary circumstances of vaults—unless it is asserted that the remains were dug up from the place of their first interment, and re-interred in this vault at Trummery. But, to prove re-interment, rather than admit that the remains were discovered, by chance, by the builder of the Round Tower, is to disprove the monumental character of the Tower: for, if the remains had ever been interred elsewhere, why was not the Round Tower built over them there—that is, if the Round Tower were intended to be monumental? Who can say, with confidence, that the founder of the Round Tower may not have possessed sufficient piety to surround the remains of a stranger with a vault, especially when it was through his means that the resting-place of the dead had been invaded? The Tower and the vault were of equal age; and as, apparently, the remains were not enclosed in a vault at their interment, we can hardly think that they were those of an individual of sufficient consequence to have a Round Tower for his monument. Moreover, only the skull, an arm-bone, and a few fragmentary bones, lay within the earth covered by the Tower's circumference: *the greater portion of the*

*remains lay outside the outer circumference:* a circumstance which will go a good way towards establishing the non-monumental character of the Tower at Trummery: for, what builder would allow the greater portion of a corpse to exceed the limits of the mausoleum which he was directed to place over it? \* The position of the remains found at Trummery is shown in an illustration in the *Ulster Journal of Archaeology* (vol. 3, p. 299).

Had the Round Towers been erected as mausoleums, they would have been placed over the bodies of kings and heroes; and would not have escaped mention, supposing them Pagan, in the *Senchas na Relec*, or History of the Cemeteries, an ancient Irish treatise, published by Petrie (pp. 97-101). Had they been Christian mausoleums, they would have been inscribed with the *Oroit*, or prayer for the departed, found upon the oldest Christian monuments discovered in this country, dating from the sixth century.

The following considerations, united, show that the Round Towers were ecclesiastical. (1). Ancient Churches still are, or, at least, are known to have been, in proximity to them.† To be closer, in several cases, is physically impossible. (2). Where the original Churches remain, architectural features are observable, similar to those in the Round Towers. (3). Christian emblems are carved on some of them. On that of Antrim, there is a cross over the doorway; and the crucifixion is over the entrance to the Towers of Brechin and Donaghmore. There are, also, on the Tower at Brechin the emblems before noticed.

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\* This historical vault at Trummery is now possessed by relatives of the writer's wife. Three aged members of her family are buried in it.

† Two of the writer's audience have suggested to him, in conversation, that no ecclesiastical ruins are known to have existed near the Round Towers of Ram Island and Antrim. He must tell the reader what he told those gentlemen, namely, that Barton's *Lectures on Lough Neagh*, written in the last century, speak of "the ruins of a Church, with a Round Tower," as then existing in the former place. (Reeves, p. 48). The ruins of the Church are now completely gone. And, as to Antrim Tower, which now stands on a smooth sward: when some old houses were being removed in the vicinity of the Tower, early in this century, "extensive foundations" were discovered, believed to have been those of an abbey, built there by a disciple of St. Patrick's, as mentioned by Camden. (*Dublin Penny Journal*, vol. 2, p. 18). Dr. Reeves, writing in 1847, says (p. 63):—"The testimony of those who removed the foundations of adjacent walls . . . , and especially of the mason who, about twenty years ago, repaired the cap of the Tower, and built into it a sculptured architrave of freestone, which he found among the ruins, goes to prove that this Tower, like all its fellows, has had in its day, a Church beside it."



Against consideration No. 1, Vallancey's adherents object that the circumstance of Round Towers and Churches being found together, is not enough to prove that the Round Towers were built for any Christian purpose: for the clergy, they argue, esteemed it excellent policy, when Paganism was not quite overthrown in Ireland, to erect their Churches beside those edifices which were revered as sacred by our idolatrous forefathers, the Round Towers being, they say, the edifices in question. The answer to this is:—Establish, in face of the stern facts previously set forth, that the Pagan Irish used lime-cement in their stone structures, before claiming that the Round Towers are Pagan works, religious or secular. Failing this, the Round Towers must be of Christian origin; and if Christian, ecclesiastical; because, ancient Churches would not have been in their immediate vicinity—sometimes right up against them—had the Towers been secular buildings.

With regard to consideration No. 2, a similar style of masonry pervades both Round Towers and ancient Churches. Where the original Church exists, or one of equal age, the doorways and windows correspond with those of the Round Tower. The doorways of both will be found to have converging jambs; and, in the oldest specimens, to display the large quadrilateral lintel. The two-fold shape of the window-opes, in some of the Towers (see p. 18), appears in many of our ancient Churches also. Should it be objected that even this similarity does not prevent the Round Towers from having been of Pagan erection—because, the Churches, in these respects, may have been only *copies* of a style of architecture prevalent in Pagan Ireland—the objection may be met by reiterating the demand made in the preceding paragraph.

Against consideration No. 3, it is urged that sculptures, such as these, may have been executed in Christian times; and the Towers Pagan, notwithstanding. But the fact that these emblems have been *raised upon the stone*, shows that they are as old as the Tower on which they appear. Emblems, *standing out upon the stone*, as they do, could not have been executed as after-works, unless the stone which displays the sculpture—supposing it part of the original masonry—had been removed, carved in this manner, and restored to its place. This course is not likely to have been adopted: for, had the Towers been Pagan, and, had it subsequently become desirable to identify them with a Christian purpose, by means of religious emblems, the easiest way—at least, with a simple

sculpture, like the pierced cross at Antrim—would have been to *hollow it out of the stone*, without removing any of the masonry. Probability, then, is in favour of all such emblems being coeval with the Towers; and the emblems prove the Towers to have been ecclesiastical: for, why should crosses, crucifixions, and, in one case, a figure of St. John the Baptist, have been sculptured upon non-ecclesiastical Towers?

That the Round Towers were ecclesiastical, can be established by even better evidence than the foregoing. Inferentially, they are described as such, in a poem by Suibhne Geilt, contained in a MS. of the eighth century. The language of this ancient writer is obsolete and obscure, as noticed by O'Curry (see his *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish*, vol. 3, p. 45); but it is sufficiently clear upon this point. The following occurs in this MS., literally translated:—

“My believing in the God of Heaven,  
That raised the choicest Towers.”  
(*Mu chridecan dia du nim,*  
*Is hé tuga tóir rodtoig*).

Now, none but *ecclesiastical* Towers would have had, as the motive of their erection, anyone's “belief in the God of Heaven.” To make assurance doubly sure—Giraldus Cambrensis, who visited Ireland 700 years ago, specifically refers to the Round Towers as *Turres ecclesiasticas*, or “ecclesiastical Towers,” in his *Topographia Hibernie* (Dist. 2, c. 9, p. 720).

For what purpose, then, were they erected? To be used, as Petrie has incontrovertibly established, primarily as belfries, and, secondarily, as keeps, in which the sacred vessels, relics, and other Church valuables, might be stored in seasons of public danger. That the most ancient Round Towers are detached structures, instead of being an objection, is a strong presumption in favour of the belfry theory. There are detached belfries to this day, in England, and on the Continent. But, what is more relevant to the issue, the earliest belfries in Ireland were detached. Let us prove this. A prophecy, ascribed to St. Moling, who flourished in the seventh century, and preserved in the Book of Leinster, a MS. of the twelfth century, refers to a time when “belfries” shall be placed “over Churches.” (*Corbar clothige ós cella*). From this, we infer that the writer of the “prophecy”—for, it is not really St. Moling's, but a forgery of the eleventh century, nevertheless, of historical value—believed that, in the seventh century, St. Moling's time, the belfry was a detached building.

Again, Connell MacGeoghegan—not the popular historian of that surname—in his translation of the *Annals of Clonmacnois*, made in 1627, speaking of the destruction of Armagh, by fire, A.D. 989 (*recte* 996), states that the conflagration involved “both Church, houses, and steeple,” an expression which clearly indicates that the steeple, or belfry, was independent of the Church. In the *Annals of Tighernach*, written in the eleventh century, we read that Armagh was again given to the flames, A.D., 1020, with “the great stone Church, and the belfry, with its bells.” (*7 in damliag mor, 7 in cloictech co n-a clogaib*). The *Annals of Ulster*, the *Four Masters*, and the *Annals of Clonmacnois*, all concur in this separate mention of the belfry. The *Annals of Innisfallen*, recording a fire at Trim, in 1127, reverse the expression thus:—“The steeple and the Church, &c.” (*Chloicthech ocus teampull*.) These singularities of phraseology would not have been persistently indulged in, had it not been that the early Irish belfries were structures entirely distinct from the Church edifice. A fragment of an ancient Commentary on the Brehon Laws shows, that the belfries were of stone. (Petrie, pp. 54, 149, 151, 365, 374, 375). Where, then, are the detached stone belfries? We possess the ruins of many Churches of a thousand years of age; and, would it not be singular, if we should be without a single specimen of the detached belfry? Yet, no detached belfries belonging to our ancient Churches exist, unless the Round Towers are such; and that they are such, we may fairly presume, from the fact—to begin only with presumption—that these Towers, invariably, either have, or are known to have had, ancient Churches beside them. The Round Towers have that height which is necessary for a belfry; and the Irish-speaking peasantry, as well as our MSS., call them *cloictheachs*, or *cloigtheachs*: which, let it be noted, is also Irish for a belfry.\* That there can be no mistake as to the Round Towers being so-named, the following references to our historical records will sufficiently evince. The ancient *Annals of Tighernach*, record, A.D. 1076, the assassination of a prince in the *cloictheach* of Kells. There is a Round Tower at Kells to this day. The *Chronicon Scotorum*, the *Annals of Ulster*, and the *Four Masters*, speak of the *cloictheach* of

\* By the Irish-speaking peasantry, the Round Tower is also called *clogas*, and *cuilceach*, the former being only a corruption of *cloictheach*, and derived from *cloe*, or *clog*, “a bell:” the latter, literally, meaning “a reed-house,” a poetical name, and defined, in Dr. O’Brien’s *Irish Dictionary*, to mean “a steeple,” i.e., belfry.

Monasterboice, under date A.D. 1097. There is still a Round Tower at Monasterboice. The *Four Masters* speak of a certain Eochaidh O'Cuinn, as burned in the *cloictheach* of Fertagh, A.D. 1156. The Round Tower of Fertagh yet exists. The *cloictheach* of Telach Ard, near Trim, is mentioned by the *Four Masters*, under date A.D. 1171. This Round Tower fell about the year 1764. The *Chronicon Scotorum* records the finishing, or roofing, of the *great cloictheach* of Clonmacnois (*cloictheach mór*), A.D. 1124. The *great* Round Tower of Clonmacnois is an existing object of interest, as well as the smaller one. The *Chronicon Scotorum* records that lightning struck the *cloictheach* of Roscrea, A.D. 1135. The Round Tower of Roscrea still exists, though evidently injured by the electric fluid. There can be no doubt, then, that our Round Towers are the *cloictheachs* of ancient authorities. We then take another step forward. The *Four Masters* record that the *cloictheach* of Slane was burned, A.D. 948, by the Danes, "with its full of relics and good people, with Caoinchair, Reader of Slane, and the crosier of the patron Saint, and a bell—the best of bells" (*agus clocc ba deach do chloccaibh*), expressions which show that the *cloictheach*, or Round Tower, was a belfry. The same *Annals* state that, in 1552, the English plundered Clonmacnois, "and the large bells were carried from the *cloictheach*" (*7 na cluicc mhóra do bhreith ar an g-cloictheach*. Petrie, pp. 374-393). Again, a tract of the Brehon Laws, preserved in the Book of Lecan, states that it was among the duties of an *aistire*, or lowest ecclesiastical officer, to ring the bell of a *cloictheach*—"Noble his work when it is the bell of a *cloictheach*." (*Uasal athrcoir, in tan is cloc cloicthighe*.) A fragment of an ancient Commentary on the Brehon Laws,\* lays down a rule, to be observed by our builders, with respect to the proportion which ought to exist between a Church and its belfry; and it has been found that this rule accords very well with the measurements of existing old Churches, and the Round Towers beside them, proving that the Round Towers were belfries. As instances, Petrie applies it (p. 366), to the Towers and Churches of Glendalough and Inishcaltra, with satisfactory results. An oak beam, from which, apparently, a bell would be suspended, may still be seen in position, near the top window-opes of the Round Tower of Antrim; and this Tower is popularly known as "the Steeple"—an expression which is suggestive of its

\* This MS. was discovered by Eugene O'Curry, in 1837. (See his *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish*, vol. 3, p. 51).



traditional use as a belfry. The gentleman, in whose grounds it stands, is familiarly spoken of as "Mr. Clarke, of the Steeple." In the memory of persons living in 1833, an oak beam, known as "the bell-tree," fell from the top of the Round Tower of Trummery. (*Dublin Penny Journal*, vol. 2, p. 89). When Smith published his *History of Waterford*, in 1746, there were, in the Round Tower of Ardmore, three pieces of oak, belonging to the bell-tree; and he called attention to two channels cut in the sill of the doorway, where the bell-rope came out, the ringer standing outside. (Ledwich's *Antiquities of Ireland*, p. 163). Tradition declares that Ardmore bell could be heard eight miles off. The peasantry about Rattoo, County Kerry, have a tradition that the bell which once hung in the neighbouring Round Tower was of solid silver. Indeed, the great stream of popular tradition, where it has not been vitiated by contact with the "bookish theoretic," crazed with fire-temples, anchorites' habitations, and so forth, has been found to flow in favour of the belfry theory. The advocates of the various theories, previously examined, are forced to admit that bells were placed in the Round Towers at a remote period; but, as none of their own theories respecting the *original* uses of the Round Towers will survive investigation, we are entitled to extend this admission to the date when the Towers were erected, and claim that they were belfries from the beginning.

It is sometimes said that there is not room in the top chamber for a moderate bell to swing in. But the average Round Tower affords an internal diameter of six feet at the top. This is sufficient to accommodate larger bells than any possessed by the ancient Irish. Moreover, bells of a very fair size have been hung in the Round Towers of Cloyne, Castledermot, and elsewhere, in modern times. The most recent instance was at Kinneh. Writing in 1871, Canon Smiddy, in his *Essay on the Druids, the Ancient Churches, and the Round Towers of Ireland* (p. 212), says of this Tower:—"Lately a bell was placed in it." As a belfry, the Round Tower has this advantage over a spire, that, in it, the bell can be elevated nearer to the top.

Dr. O'Connor alleges that our early belfries were of wood; and this, he conceives, disproves the belfry theory of the Round Towers. Dr. O'Connor, however, has furnished his own refutation: for, in his edition of the *Four Masters*, it is recorded that in 1121, a stone, struck by lightning, out of the belfry at Tullamaine, killed a student; and the Dr. himself, in his Latin version of the *Four Masters*, translates the Irish

word for "belfry," in this passage, by *campanile*, the well-known Latin equivalent. How could he assert, after this, that the ancient Irish belfries were not built of stone? He also urges that the Round Towers cannot have been the ancient belfries, because our *Annals* relate the burning of belfries containing ecclesiastics: whereas, he argues, the Round Towers, in consequence of their shape, could not have held many persons; and being, as he has the temerity to say, "in no part, of wood," could not be burned. It is sufficient to reply with Petrie (p. 64), that the Round Towers, according to the number of floors, are capable of holding from fifty to eighty persons, "at the moderate average of ten to each floor;" and, as to the impossibility of the Towers being burned, the doors were of wood, and so were the floors of the majority; and the wooden portion is all that we are to suppose to have been consumed—just as when our *Annals* record the burning of *daimhliags* [pronounced *Duleeks*], or stone Churches, all we are to conclude is, that the roofs and combustible fittings were destroyed. And why might not the Annalists say that Round Towers, which were partly of wood, were burned, when some of them say, in passages quoted in this Essay (pp. 57-58), that metal bells were burned? This "burning" is not to be taken literally. Brick and stone buildings are daily burned—in the same sense as the Round Towers were burned. Dr. O'Connor thinks that the *cloictheach*, or belfry, of Monasterboice, which was burned in 1097, cannot have been a Round Tower. But common sense will show that it was nothing else. A Round Tower still exists at Monasterboice. "It is yet known," says Petrie (pp. 65-66), "only by the name given it by the Annalist, namely, the *cloictheach*;" and, with such a strong and lofty Tower attached to their monastery, it is quite ridiculous to suppose that the monks of St. Boethius would have deposited their little library, and other precious things, in a wooden edifice for safety."

Some have insisted that the Round Towers cannot have been belfries, because, the Church at Donaghmore, County Meath, has three apertures for bells in the gable, notwithstanding that there is a Round Tower in the immediate vicinity. It should, however, be understood that the Church at present at Donaghmore is not the original building, but only a reconstruction of the thirteenth century, when the Anglo-Norman system of bells and belfries was in fashion. Some of the Towers were, accordingly, disused; and this explains why there are belfries at Swords and a few other places, where there are Round Towers also.

D'Alton, in his *History of County Dublin* (p. 920), says :—  
 “ It would be hard to conjecture why Christians should build their Churches of such frail materials as wicker and wood, and erect everlasting belfries at such a vast charge, as must have been expended upon these [the Round Towers].” Exploded antiquarianism believed that *stone* Churches were unknown in Ireland before the twelfth century. Our smaller sacred edifices, it is admitted, were generally constructed of wood till the twelfth century ; but, from St. Patrick's days, the Cathedrals were of stone. It is true he built wooden Churches ; but the following incident will show that all his Churches cannot have been of wood. It is said, in his *Tripartite Life*—of which we have now a MS., belonging to the seventh century, discovered by O'Curry—that St. Patrick proceeded to Mount Usneach to erect a Church. Being opposed by persons of the blood royal, he thought to continue the work by promising that their descendants should govern the intended Church. Violence, however, was resorted to against him. Our apostle then cursed the *stones* of the vicinity ; and thenceforward, says the writer of the *Life*, the stones of Mount Usneach became useless as building material : hence, it was said, as a proverb, of anything which did not fulfil its destined use :—“ It is one of the stones of Mount Usneach.” From this, it is plain that St. Patrick intended to build the Church of stone. A poem, written by Flann, of Monasterboice, early in the eleventh century, gives the names of three masons attached to St. Patrick's train, with this comment :—“ They made *daimhliags* first in Erin : eminent their history” :—

*Iad do rigni damliag ar tús*

*A n-Erind ; ard a n-imthús.*

What were *daimhliags* ? Ancient Irish Glossaries, quoted by Petrie (p. 142), define *daimhliag* [pronounced *Duleek*] to be “ an edifice of stone ; ” and the term is applied, *par excellence*, to a Cathedral, or abbey Church, by native writers, some of whom, like Flann and Tighernach, wrote before the age when, it is alleged, stone Churches first began to be erected in Ireland, and all of whom were too wise to designate *wooden* Churches, by a term which means “ an edifice of stone.” Moreover, the *Life of St. Colman Ela*, written in Irish of a very venerable character, and quoted by O'Curry, in his *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish* (vol. 3, p. 34), relates of a certain native prince that he evinced his humility by attending those “ who

were setting the *stones* in the wall of the Church :” whence, it is apparent that there were stone Churches in Ireland in St. Colman Ela’s day, or the seventh century. The *Four Masters* speak of a stone Church (*doinhliac*), destroyed by fire, A.D. 935, at Kilclief, County Down, and they also record that the stone Church and Round Tower of Downpatrick were injured by lightning, A.D. 1015. (*Daimhliacc agus con a cloitech*. Reeves, pp. 41, 217). The *Annals of Ulster* record that a man was killed in a brawl, in Armagh, A.D. 788, “at the door of the stone oratory :” (*in hostio [ostio] oratorii lapidei*.) The same *Annals*, A.D. 839, relate the burning of Armagh, “with its stone Churches” (*7 a daimliacc*). The *Annals of Tighernach*, A.D. 1020, speak of Armagh as again burned, together with “the great stone Church, with its roof of lead” (*daimliag mor co n-a tuigi do luaidhe*. Petrie, pp. 144-149). If stone buildings had been unknown here till the twelfth century, how came Giraldus Cambrensis, who flourished in that century, to speak of the Round Towers as built *more patrie*—“after the fashion of the country?” And since it is evident, from Giraldus Cambrensis, that there were stone buildings in Ireland before his time, who can believe that none of the Churches were of stone? But, does not Saint Bernard, in his *Life of St. Malachy* (c. 9), relate that, when St. Malachy began to erect a stone oratory at Bangor, in the twelfth century, the inhabitants wondered, because buildings, similar to St. Malachy’s, were, to them, a novelty? It is not, however, recorded by St. Bernard that any exception was taken to the *material* of this oratory. The individual, who expostulated with St. Malachy, merely asked him :—“What necessity was there for so superfluous and superb a structure?” (*Quid opus erat opere tum superfluo tam superbo?*) objecting, seemingly, only to the magnificence which it was to exemplify. And when it is stated that the intended oratory was to resemble what St. Malachy had seen *in aliis regionibus*—“in other regions”—“the word ‘regions’ may mean other parts of Ireland, which was divided into various kingdoms and principalities, that might well have been deemed separate regions.” (Stuart’s *Armagh*, p. 583). Indeed, judging from existing remains, stone-building, as Petrie has observed (p. 423), was more extensively practised in the South and West than in the North, in ancient days : a fact which may throw some light upon this passage from St. Bernard. The inhabitants of Bangor, owing to inexperience in architectural matters, may have been surprised at the *elaborate*



*character* of St. Malachy's oratory; but a stone Church was no novelty to them; one had been built at Bangor long before St. Malachy's time: for, the *Four Masters* record the murder of a chieftain, which took place in the *daimhliag*, or "stone Church," of Bangor, A.D. 1065. (Reeves, p. 362). The testimony of St. Bernard is not, in any event, to outweigh native records, some of them written centuries before he was born, and all speaking of stone Churches as existing here from the first ages, after our conversion. St. Bernard never was in Ireland; and Lanigan, Stuart, and other historians have shown that he was misinformed, or misunderstood his informant, upon several matters connected with manners in this country. When it is objected against the belfry theory of the Round Towers, that stone Churches did not exist in Ireland till the twelfth century, the objection is null, being founded upon error.

Another objection arises from the elevated doorways. "What architect," asks Lanigan (vol. 4, p. 400), "would have constructed a belfry which the bell-ringer could not enter, except by a ladder?" To answer this, it must be observed that the Round Towers were not belfries *only*. They were also defensive keeps, in which the ecclesiastics might take refuge, when necessary, with the sacred vessels, relics, books, &c.: hence, the precaution of a high doorway, and; in several instances, double doors. The military towers built in England and Wales, after the time of the Romans, present analogous features, the doorways being small and elevated. Examples of these exist at Brunless, Launceston, Dolbaddern, &c. Petrie (p. 367), publishes an illustration of the ruined military tower at Brunless; and, it is, to all intents and purposes, a ruined Round Tower. The Round Towers were so generally recognised as keeps, that the old Irish were wont to apply to defensive structures the name of a Round Tower, viz.:—*cloitheach*. An ancient Irish translation of a *Life* of Charlemagne, gives to the fortified residence of an exiled nobleman, the name of *cloitheach*. The *Leabhar Breac*, or Speckled Book, speaks of a *silver tower*, said to have been built by a Persian monarch, who placed his jewels in it, and, we are told, his throne; and it is called a *cloitheach*, the Irish scribe evidently having in his mind the uses of our *cloitheachs*, or Round Towers, as defensive store-houses.

A passage from the *Annals of the Four Masters*, though quoted before, may be repeated, as it indicates the two-fold purpose of the Round Tower, which was both a belfry and

an ecclesiastical keep. It is as follows :—"A.D. 948. The *cloitheach* of Slane was burnt by the Danes, with its full of relics and good people, with Caoinchair, Reader of Slane, and the crosier of the patron Saint, and a bell—the best of bells." (*Cloithech Sláine do loscadh do Ghallaibh, co n-a lán, mhionnaibh agus deghdhaoinibh, in Chaoinchair fear léighinn Slaine, agus bachall an erlanna, agus clocc ba deach do chloccaibh*). The same event is recorded in the *Annals of Ulster*, and, in a more condensed form, in the *Chronicon Scotorum*. The *Annals of the Four Masters* record the following of the Round Tower of Monasterboice :—"A.D. 1097. The *cloitheach* of the Monastery, i.e., of Monasterboice, with many books and treasures, was burnt." (*Cloitheach Mainistreach, i. Mainistreach Buite, co leabhraibh agus co d-taiscedhaibh, do loscadh*). The *Annals of Ulster* and the *Chronicon Scotorum* record the same event. Similar passages are cited by Petrie (pp. 373-376).

Against this portion of Petrie's theory, it is objected that there was no necessity to build ecclesiastical keeps, two centuries before the Danish invasions, as till then, the Irish Church enjoyed absolute peace ; and, it is asked :—"Did the Irish clergy see so far ahead?" There is more wit than knowledge of Irish history in this objection. The Danes were not the first to plunder and destroy our sacred edifices. In the year 684, Egfrid, King of Northumbria, devastated the country, from Dublin towards Drogheda. Speaking of the Northumbrian inroad, Lanigan says, in his *Ecclesiastical History of Ireland* (vol. 3, p. 89) :—"These marauders spared neither churches nor monasteries ; and carried away many captives, besides a considerable deal of plunder." The monastery of Bangor, too, was burned by other hordes, who came from England, and penetrated Ulster and Connaught in the seventh century. There can be little doubt, too, that, in a country divided into so many kingdoms and hostile chieftainries, and torn by civil wars, from the earliest times, the clergy soon saw the desirability of protecting themselves, and the rich golden vessels of the Church, from the lawlessness that might accompany a neighbouring chieftain, when he invaded the lands of, perhaps, the rival under whose jurisdiction they lived. Notwithstanding the great reverence which, generally speaking, the ancient Christian Irish, entertained towards the Church, instances in which the contrary feeling manifested itself, are not unknown. Was not Tara abandoned, as a royal residence, in consequence of the curse laid upon it, in the sixth century, by St. Ruadhan,

because the right of sanctuary attached to his monastery had been violated, when a fugitive was dragged thence, and murdered? St. Columbkille's holy character was not sufficient to defend another fugitive from justice; and the right of sanctuary was again violated, as related by Keating (p. 375). St. Columbkille himself, and the ecclesiastics connected with him, were pelted with dirt by a rabble. Even Irish kings and princes, long before, and during, the Danish invasions, laid violent hands on the clergy, and on the property of the Church. Speaking of King Congall Cionnmaghair, who ascended the throne A.D. 693, Keating (p. 406) says:—"This Congall was a cruel persecutor of the Irish Church, and he burned the regular and secular clergy at Kildare, without mercy or distinction." Feargall, his successor, A.D. 702, "broke into a Church called Cillin, and carried away all the holy vessels." King Feidhlime, A.D. 932, devastated Clonmacnois, burning "up to the Church door," and putting "numbers of its holy inmates to death" (Moore's *History of Ireland*, vol. 2, p. 27). He carried the clergy of Kildare into captivity. King Aedh, in the eighth century, "pillaged some Churches in the diocese of Armagh" (Stuart's *Armagh*, p. 94). The same author says (p. 119):—"A.D. 989, the people of Uriel plundered the town, set fire to the houses and Church, and reduced Armagh to a most deplorable situation." History frequently records the devastation inflicted upon ecclesiastical places by Irish chieftains. An O'Rorke plundered Ardfert, A.D. 1031. Another O'Rorke and an O'Kelly plundered Clonmacnois and Clonfert, A.D. 1065. A Munster fleet plundered Clonmacnois A.D. 1092. (Lanigan's *Ecclesiastical History of Ireland*, vol. 3, pp. 491-493). The list of sacrileges might be easily increased, but the task is an invidious one. It is probable, then, that the clergy had had experience of native violence before building the earliest of the Round Towers, as they certainly had before the erection of most of them.

A passage from an Irish poem, of the ninth century, is quoted by Petrie (p. 382), as evidence that the Round Towers were sometimes places of sanctuary. Literally translated, it says:—"He who commits a theft, it will be grievous to thee, if he obtain his protection in the house of a king, or of a bell." (*I tigh righ no chluic*). Such sculptures as the cross over the doorway of Antrim Tower, similar to that upon the Church of St. Fechin, of Fore, appeared to Petrie to indicate "that both Churches and Towers were regarded as sanctuaries."

Dr. W. K. Sullivan, in his *Introduction to O'Curry's Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish* (vol. I, p. dxxxvi.), offers a suggestion as to the further purposes of the Round Towers. He says, referring to our early ecclesiastical usages:—"A Church was entitled to share the property of all strangers, dying within sound of its bell, and, if situated on the shore of a lake, or of the sea, to all 'flotsam, or jetsam,' that is, to some such rights as are now claimed as 'admiralty droits.' It was only the original bell, under the protection of which a *Tuath* [district] had placed itself, that could be used for measuring the rights, or jurisdiction, of a Church: hence, no doubt, one of the chief objects in building the *cloitigi*, or bell-houses, known as Round Towers, was to extend the area over which the sound could be heard."

A Round Tower belfry seems to have been the distinctive mark of a Cathedral Church. The consequent large number of bishops is not an objection. St. Patrick, according to his *Tripartite Life*, consecrated 370 bishops for Ireland; and, as Dr. Reeves remarks, in his *Ecclesiastical Antiquities of Down, Connor, and Dromore* (p. 123):—"A moderate acquaintance with the ancient ecclesiastical records of the island is sufficient to impress the mind with the conviction that episcopal ordination was very frequent in the primitive Church of Ireland, and that, in raising ministers to the office of bishop, respect was had, rather to their qualifications in piety, learning, and zeal, than to the claims of the district over which they were placed."

The belief that Round Towers are seen beneath the waters of Lough Neagh, "when the clear, cold eve's declining," is as old, at least, as the twelfth century, when it was mentioned by Giraldus Cambrensis. The essayist has questioned many of the fishermen upon the subject; but never met one who claimed to have beheld such visions. Canon Smiddy considers the following circumstance as the probable origin of the fable:—"Lough Neagh often overflows its banks, as the exit for its waters is very narrow. The reed was the model of the Round Tower, and, as the reeds were here often buried deep in the water, their appearance, down in the lake, might have suggested the idea, or image, of those tall structures called the reed-houses." (*Essay on the Druids, &c.*, p. 286). Lough Neagh fishermen, however, are not altogether incredulous regarding the Round Towers. A veteran, who rowed the writer to Ram Island, was confident that the Tower existing there had been built by women!



As Petrie has been so often cited in these pages, it may be mentioned that he overcame the prejudices of many with respect to the Round Towers, notable among the converts being Thomas Davis. This brilliant genius—himself an ardent student of our antiquities—in his review of Petrie (*Essays*, p. 63), says :—"We plead guilty to having opened Mr. Petrie's work, strongly bigoted against his conclusion." Davis had been infatuated with what he felicitously calls the "sweet frenzy," which assigns to the Round Towers a remote Pagan antiquity. Here is how he records his progress to sanity regarding them :—"We repeat, we jealously watched for flaws in Mr. Petrie's reasoning ; exulted as he set down the extracts from his opponents, in the hope that he would fail in answering them ; and, at last, surrendered with a sullen despair. Looking, now, more calmly at the discussion, we are grateful to Mr. Petrie for having driven away an idle fancy. In its stead, he has given us new and unlooked-for trophies, and more solid information on Irish antiquities than any of his predecessors." He concludes by thanking Petrie "for having displaced a heap of incongruous, though agreeable, fancies, and given us the most learned, the most exact, and the most important work ever published on the antiquities of the ancient Irish Nation." Petrie's *Inquiry into the Origin and Uses of the Round Towers* carries with it all the weight that could be given to it by Dr. John O'Donovan and Professor Eugene O'Curry, the two greatest masters of the Irish language and antiquities that the world has yet seen, or is, perhaps, destined to see. O'Curry writes of it thus :—"I may say that there was no reference whatever which, at the time, could be discovered in our ancient MSS., bearing, in any way, on the erection of ecclesiastical, or other buildings, that was not pressed into the pages of Dr. Petrie's book ; and it is satisfactory to that eminent scholar and artist, and to those who lent their more humble efforts to relieve him of some part of his laborious investigations, to say, that, although all our ancient Gaedhelic MSS. at home, and several in England and in foreign countries, have, since that time, undergone a more thorough examination, nothing has been discovered—indeed, nothing, I believe, ever can—to throw the smallest doubt upon the clear conclusions on the origin and uses of the Round Towers, to which, after long thought and research, he had come." (*Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish*, vol. 3, pp. 51-52).

In drawing this Essay to a close, the author admits that

eloquence has been absent from his labours ; but, he humbly conceives that, even if he had it to bestow, as he has not, it would be misapplied upon this occasion. The theme has been a purely antiquarian one ; and he has striven to preserve that unadorned cast of expression which, while according best with antiquarian literature, harmonises, in an especial degree, with a dissertation upon such plain buildings as the Round Towers of Ireland. Instruction having been his only aim, popular treatment, as it is called, to him, appeared best eschewed, as not sufficiently wide-reaching to be satisfactory. He has endeavoured, with regard to the Round Towers, to present to his audience, a rapid view of those facts and arguments which, unfortunately for the student, are, at present, confined to expensive works. Should this Essay serve to create a spirit of deeper inquiry in the breast of even one who may have followed it, stimulating him to penetrate still further into the rich storehouse of our venerable history and antiquities, the author—could so happy a consummation become known to him, as the result of his humble efforts—would be more gratified with this, an abiding evidence of appreciation, than with that applause which might, perhaps, have been his, had he strewn his pages with more flowers.

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ADDENDA ET CORRIGENDA.

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To List of Authorities add :—

KEATING, REV. GEOFFREY, D.D. *History of Ireland.* Dublin, 1861.

SMIDDY, VERY REV. RICHARD, CANON. *Essay on the Druids, the Ancient Churches, and the Round Towers of Ireland.* Dublin, 1871.

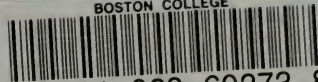
Page 35, line 27 : for *model* read *models*.

— 40 — 20 : for *no* read *on*.

— — — 43 : for *bridged* read *abridged*.



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